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# EDITH ;

OR,

## LIFE'S CHANGES.

He came too late, neglect had tried  
Her constancy too long,  
Her love had yielded to her pride,  
And the deep sense of wrong.

DUBLIN:  
WILLIAM ROBERTSON, SACKVILLE-ST.  
LONDON : SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO.  
1858.

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# EDITH.

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## CHAPTER I.

“Soft as the memory of buried love,  
Pure as the prayer that childhood wafts above.”  
—BYRON.

“SHE is a pretty girl, decidedly—a very pretty girl, *Blanché*; but still, as you say, I would rather talk to Edith, to Miss Waldron, she is such a fascinating little thing, and has fifty times more in her, too, in a quiet way. She is *nicer*, moreover; it is a lady’s word, but it suits her; she is nicer than either of the other girls.”

“No doubt, you know Miss Edith was always my especial favourite—in fact, I believe it was I who first drew your attention

to her, for she is not a girl absolutely to strike a man's admiration at once."

"Quite a mistake, my dear fellow. You praised her, certainly, but I admired her from the first evening she walked into your sister's drawing-room. There was something in the very turn of her silken curls that won my heart instantler, and her voice completed the charm, it is so peculiarly soft, so exactly herself. If she had but some ten or twenty thousand pounds there is no saying how far I might be tempted."

"Yes, but she has not, nor is ever likely to have," rejoined the second speaker, a smart, good-looking man, of somewhere about forty, or it might chance a little more; "she has not a penny," he said, drily, "and, under the circumstances, considering what a confoundedly good-looking fellow you are, and all that, I must say, I think you are going on rather fast—carrying the joke a little too far, in fact.

If Edith Waldron happens to be an uncommonly nice little girl, I do not see that that is any reason why you should do your best to make her unhappy. I must say, I think it is a shame."

"Unhappy! pooh! nonsense," returned his companion laughing, though his very handsome face flushed suddenly, as he caused an additional puff to emerge from his meerschaum; "nonsense, man! You do not mean to insinuate that you are so desperately primitive as to hold such an antediluvian idea. I knew Oldfield was a hundred years behind the rest of the world, but really I did not think it contained such an utterly exploded notion. Why, my dear fellow, girls are not so *green* now-a-days as to be made unhappy by a little harmless flirtation; surely, you do not believe in the theory of broken hearts and blighted affections, a myth exploded before I was born?—that would be too good."

"I said nothing about broken hearts, nor thought of them," returned the elder gentleman, somewhat tartly; "Edith Waldron is no fool, nor would I insult her by insinuating the idea that there was the slightest chance of her caring seriously about you; but I do say, that you are doing your best to make her do so, and I believe that you care about her, too, not a little either."

"And so I do—of course I do," retorted the young man, laughingly, and yet with a tone of truth in the softness of his musical voice, "I think her the very dearest little girl I know; but I utterly repudiate the idea of having the smallest intention of causing her a moment's unhappiness, even if I had the power of doing so. Why, my dear fellow, her heart is precisely like an India-rubber ball, the moment the pressure is removed, it will spring back into its original shape. She is of far too

soft materials for deep impressions or lasting ones."

His voice fell slightly on the last words.

"I don't agree with you ; I do not think you know Edith at all !" exclaimed Dr. Tylden, impatiently ; "that may be the way in the great world (your world, at least), but as you say Oldfield is an old-fashioned place, and since Edith has lived there all her life, you cannot expect her to be beyond it. I say, and repeat, you are going too far."

"How ! committing myself ?" inquired his companion, quietly ; "is that your meaning ?"

"No ; you know well it is not," rejoined Tylden, sharply ; "there is not the smallest danger of a breach of promise, &c. ; but, in fact, you know how long I have known Edith Waldron, and I say that I think you are going the shortest road towards destroying her greatest charm, her belief in



the good of all mankind. Just pause, and think what you are about, for you are not hardened to the work yet."

"Thanks for even that saving clause," replied the young man, smiling and puffing on vigorously, "and to please you solely for that, I will endeavour to think deeply from this until six o'clock, and give you the result at dinner; but remember," he added, raising himself from his semi-recumbent position, as his companion was moving towards the door, "remember this, that I neither presume to say that I have the power of making Miss Waldron unhappy, nor think her fool enough to be in the least danger; without any other reason, she is as well aware as I am of the absurdity of the idea, that I could be serious were I ever so well inclined—serious at two and twenty, with seven and six-pence a-day; why, man, she has more sense than you, dear soft little being though she be."

“ There you are at the ‘ softness again,’ ” interrupted Dr. Tylden, turning back; “ I tell you, you are utterly mistaken ; gentle she is, and sensitive to a fault, to the risk of infinite pain to herself, but no more ‘ soft ’ in your acceptation of the word, than you are yourself ; less so, perhaps, for not all the sophistry of most soothing reasoning could induce her to yield to the temptation to overlook right in wrong—future pain in present pleasure, did she but know it. If Edith is ever called upon by circumstances, she will prove you wrong ; she has more strength—more deep, patient strength of mind than half the energetic busy bodies you know, and that very strength would but make pain more bitter. May she never be called upon to feel it.”

“ Amen ! ” rejoined Wycherly, warmly, and with a deep expression coming into his dark hazel eyes, “ amen, though I cannot agree with you.” And with a smile

he threw himself back into his easy chair, and still with his meerschaum between his clearly cut compressed lips, relapsed into deep thought, so deep that very shortly the meerschaum went out without his becoming conscious of the fact, and lights and shadows rose and fell like gleams of fire-light in a silent room over his noble brow and eminently intellectual, though youthful face. In fact, Hubert Wycherly made some most stern and virtuous resolves during that deep cogitation, which lasted precisely until he found himself sitting beside Edith Waldron, upon a delicious little sofa, about four o'clock that afternoon, with only the warm firelight lighting up the cosy, pretty little parsonage drawing-room, and playing upon the silky curls that fell so temptingly close beside his shoulder, to which level they just reached, as he bent somewhat assiduously to assist in the unravelling of an

unruly skein of silk wound round the very slender fingers of a very fair and small hand. And thus it had been daily for many months, now, no wonder that good Dr. Tylden thought it time to remonstrate. Edith Waldron *was* a nice little girl—not so very little either in height, at least, though slight enough in all conscience, but the word suited her admirably ; she was nice in appearance, nice in thought, word, and deed, from her silken hair of rich bright auburn hue, to her graceful movements and innate refinement of taste and feeling. She was not pretty—not one bit of “a beauty,” not even “irresistibly bewitching,” yet almost every one liked to look at, and talk to Edith. There was something winning in the perfect good faith of every thought, in the simple earnestness that lighted up her soft, though far from dark grey eyes, as she raised their long lashes to look up for a moment into your

face ; something most attractive in the smile that could play like a sunbeam upon the small sweet lips, and light up the fair forehead with its penciled brows and blue veined temples into actual beauty ; that was her best point—that clear intellectual-looking forehead ; and, perhaps, it was looking at it guided Dr. Tylden to the estimate of her mental powers, so differing from that of Hubert Wycherly, who, probably, loved better to gaze at the ever-varying ductile mouth and rounded cheek, to say nothing of the delicately-shaped little hand and foot that almost first won his attention to the parson's gentle daughter.

Edith was the second of the four children of the Rev. Guy Waldron, Rector of Oldfield, whose £300 a year formed his whole income. She had one brother, older than herself—a slim, dark-eyed student at Cambridge, the pride and the pet of the family at large, and Edith's impersonation of all that was excel-

lent in man—and two sisters, younger, viz., Georgie, already at seventeen, a tall fair girl, with a dash of cleverness and fashion in every action, and so keen a sense of the ridiculous as to make her caricatures anything but pleasant to the unhappy subjects. Blanche, the youngest of the family, was also its beauty, and, though only just emerging from childhood, so precocious in her perfect ease and grace of manner, as to pass not unfrequently for the eldest. Certainly, she was very pretty, with her dark eyes and sweeping lashes, her pouting lips and ivory teeth, to say nothing of the softly full, rounded figure, that gave her such a womanly look beside Edith's childishly slender one; and withal, there was a depth and passion in her nature that lent almost fascination to her towards those whom she wished to please, especially if they loved music—for she sang and played beyond common excellence. Such were the inha-

bitants of Oldfield Rectory, with the addition of Mrs. Waldron, an active, kind-hearted woman, who tormented herself by being far too sensitive and feeling for this troublesome world ; and Mr. Waldron, who did neither, but calmly wended on his quiet way, loving his wife and children (especially Edith, whose gentleness suited him better than her sister's brilliancy), loving them all very much, and doing his duty conscientiously by the fifty or sixty souls entrusted to his guidance. Now, a few words of Mr. Wycherly, the handsome young C.E., whom we have introduced in conversation with Dr. Tylden, the busy M.D. of Oldfield.

Hubert Wycherly, Esq., was the fourth and youngest son of a man of high standing and good income in the county in which he resided ; but the family property being strictly entailed, descended, of course, to the eldest son ; so Master Hubert was to

carve his own way in the world, since five showy sisters and three elder brothers left but little to be inherited by a cadet; so his father gave him all he could in the shape of an excellent education, which, to do him justice, had been liberally bestowed, and to which Hubert, with naturally brilliant talents and a considerable dash of ambition, had done full justice; and accordingly, at twenty two, with an eminently attractive appearance, great powers of agreeability, and a certain high-bred air and tone, he was located at Oldfield, overseeing the engineering department of the works going on in that neighbourhood, receiving therefor the proud emolument of seven shillings and six pence per diem. Of course, such a personage was too great an acquisition in such a place as Oldfield (where Dr. Tylden and the young M.P. of the county were the sole companionable representatives of the male sex to be seen), not to be taken every



notice of ; and accordingly, having duly returned all the polite visits paid him, as a kind of inspection of his neighbours, the young gentleman quietly selected the Rectory as his place of intimacy, partly because being nearest to his neat lodgings in the village it was the most convenient lounge, and partly because he appreciated the air of refinement that visibly surrounded it and its inhabitants ; and there he very shortly became a daily expected visitor, and *every* afternoon and about every second evening found him in the pretty drawing-room, where, before long, casual visitors began to forget to remark that he *always* chanced to find a seat beside Edith, and *always* found something to address particularly to Edith, and *almost* always talked and walked, played, sang, and rode with Edith exclusively. The girls rebelled at first, and with Guy laid plans for keeping them apart, but the very opposition

roused his dormant energy, and the spirit of perseverance that lay beneath his more showy powers, and he was but more resolved to win his way and will, though so quietly as to attract as little notice as possible to his proceedings. In fact, to all those immediately concerned, including Edith herself, it soon seemed a mere matter of course, whilst to all others the facts were becoming perfectly palpable, that Mr. Wycherly was flirting hard and fast with little Edith Waldron, and that Edith was rapidly progressing as a most apt and docile pupil in the same accomplishment,—whether with the same feelings and intentions remains to be seen.

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## CHAPTER II.

“And she listened, looking downward, with a flush  
on cheek and brow,  
And a heart that fluttered wildly to the music of  
his vow.”

FOUR months after the conversation related above, when winter had vanished into pleasant summer, and fire-light lounges changed into evening walks and twilight saunters, exactly four months, we say, and on a sweet summer's evening, a young lady and a young gentleman sauntered slowly along a charmingly shaded walk, in precisely opposite directions, *vis a vis*, in fact, though quite unaware of the fact, for so deeply were both buried in meditation, that neither was cognisant of the other's proximity, until they stood suddenly upon the same

yard of gravelled walk, and a hand laid gently, almost tenderly (if a touch can be supposed to convey such a feeling), upon her shoulder, startled the young lady from her reverie. It might be the startling fact of being touched at all, or it might be from something electric and peculiar in the light pressure, but a quick thrill seemed to rush through Edith's frame, and with a flush trembling on cheek and brow, and a wonderfully soft expression shining in the depths of the momentarily upraised eyes, she laid her hand upon the one resting upon her arm. Surely in life there is nothing more delicious than the touch of something loved. How often will it not come back in long after years, thrilling again through every fibre, bringing back the same flush, and quiver, and throb of intense happiness. Wycherly felt it then, and a deep light flashed into his dark eyes, and *his* cheek, too, flushed suddenly, as,

bending down, he passed the other arm round her form, and clasped her quick, close, and passionately to his heart. It was only for a moment, but it was *the* moment in life—the first, best and dearest—then he released her, and with only her hands held fast in his, they stood face to face, lovers without one spoken word beyond the soft murmur of her name, breathed low and deep, in the rich music of the heart's intensest feeling, and thrilling to the inmost core of hers. \* \* \*

"Love took up the glass of time," and apparently forgot to shake it, for a whole hour passed over before the recollection occurred to either that the village choir had been all that time waiting for their instructress, and that Guy and others were, bat in hand, expecting Wycherly upon the cricket ground. The softly rustling sycamore leaves above their heads, and the thick laurels knew as much as they did

how it had passed, for it had all come hurriedly and unpremeditated—the unexpected meeting, the soft hour, and above all, the love that filled each young heart to the brim, had conspired, and without having dreamed of it one short hour before, they now stood acknowledged lovers—more to each other than all the world beside—wrapped in the first pure love of youth, utterly thoughtless of the future, at least she was; perhaps a flitting phantom of other days may have fluttered across his mind, for, by a sudden impulse, he asked her to let it remain between themselves alone at present, and with a smile she promised, too glad only to acquiesce in even that light wish. And yet he loved her dearly and truly upon that soft evening, nay, knew now that he had done so for many a day.

\* \* \* \* \*

Six weeks more, and Edith leaned against the tall sycamore alone, and her cheek

was ghastly pale, and her long lashes weighed down and heavy with bitter tears, tears wrung from a heart of whose depths even good Dr. Tylden was ignorant—a heart that Edith herself knew but little of, for it had never been tried before. But, quivering though they had been a few moments before ; Edith's lips were now pressed closely together ; and whilst her hands were clasped tightly, to withstand the sharp agony that throbbed through every nerve, a light gleamed upon her full, fair brow, that told of the strength and pride, that even anguish could not subdue.

Hubert Wycherly was gone—gone without one kind word, one parting embrace, one glance even, to mark the difference between her and her sisters, between their polite regrets and the terrible grief that filled her heart. It was strange, dream-like in its unaccountability, but it was true. For some days she had fancied he

was unusually cold, most strangely different from the ardent lover he had been from the moment of their avowal—from long before, in fact. Suddenly he had seemed to shun her—to avoid more than the merest attention required by courtesy ; and with a chill creeping over her heart, she, too, drew back. Then, one evening the dream returned again—the fond look had come back into the dark eyes, as once and again she met them resting upon her ; once more his hand had clasped her's in an almost passionate pressure, as in the dusk they stood together in the bow-window of the drawing-room, looking out upon the gathering shadows. All that evening he had lingered near, with even less regard for appearances than usual—more pertinaciously, and, as it were, clingingly ; and that night she lay awake, too happy for sleep. Next day he came not at all (the first for months), nor the next—the third



he did, to bid a hurried farewell : he had received an appointment abroad, was limited to a day, and must say a most hasty adieu; he looked pale and ill, but no word—not even a look for Edith. Half an hour, and she saw him go; watched his tall form disappear beyond her sight, and with a crushing weight upon her heart, but a flash in her eyes and upon her brow, she had turned away—turned away, with mistrust of all mankind sown in her heart; and no one, not even her sisters, dreamed of the trial through which that young spirit was passing—the trial that forms the heart for life, be it for good or evil.

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## CHAPTER III.

Two years passed, and again we return to Oldfield rectory—not the trim bright rectory of former days, but with many differences marking strongly the changes which have taken place. Outside, disorder and indifference are visible in the neglected appearance of the trampled flower-borders and torn shrubs. The climbing roses and clematis upon the trellissed walls hang in careless trails, most different from their former neatness, and weeds already springing up through the gravel and in the flower-beds, show how pre-occupied must be the minds of those who usually took such pride in the beauty of neatness. Within, the aspect is yet more forlorn ; pictures

gone from the walls, carpets off the floors, curtains laid in heaps preparatory to removal, and chairs piled together—all disorder and discomfort; and saddest of any, the group occupying the half-dismantled drawing-room. Very pale and weary-looking are Mrs. Waldron, the three girls, and Guy, as in their deep mourning they busy themselves in preparations for departure from the pleasant home they have so long occupied, and which they must now vacate in favour of the new rector, Mr. Waldron's successor, who only waits their removal to enter upon his new duties. Oh ! it is a sad and weary thing, that breaking up of all the ties and pursuits of years that must follow a clergyman's decease. How closely the heart clings round the small things that had seemed of no value whilst we might have them always with us ! How sadly memory brings back the thousand trifling joys and sorrows connected with each long-

remembered article of furniture or ornament, and with what a throb of pain in our hearts we stand for the last time upon a spot, recalling some thrill of former happiness, faded, perhaps, for ever, and forgotten by others, but still lingering in the depths of our own saddened hearts? As yet Mrs. Waldron's grief was too fresh and keen for more than a feeling of utter desolation to connect itself with her departure; but to Edith, Blanche, and Guy, each step towards removal brought a new pang, to which only their strong endeavour to spare each other prevented their yielding; besides, they had so much to do. Georgia was utterly incapacitated from giving any assistance, by the weakness consequent upon severe illness, for she had taken the same fever, which had in three days carried off poor Mr. Waldron, and still remained in extreme debility, and so all the burden of arrangements for the

auction and removal fell upon the two other girls and Guy, as well as the wearing anxiety of pecuniary matters, for which but slender provision remained.

Twenty years seemed to have passed over Mrs. Waldron's head, as listlessly turning over the few books retained by Edith, she sat in her easy-chair on the last evening of their residence at Oldfield; and Guy, too, looked wonderfully older, as with the hair pushed back from his broad, pale brow, he bent over the heap of books and papers upon a table before him; tears were dropping silently upon Georgia's thin hands, whilst impulsive Blanche, too nervous to remain still, moved hurriedly about—now assisting Edith to pack her books and music—now bending over Georgia's sofa to smooth a pillow or arrange her shawl. Edith was calmest of the group, and yet, perhaps, she was not suffering least, as the dark circles beneath

her eyes, and exceeding paleness of her cheek testified, only she was learning to "commune with her own heart, and be still"—a lesson seldom learned so early in life.

The silence had remained unbroken for a long time, at least by words, but at length, with a look and sigh of infinite relief, Guy pushed aside his papers, and looking up with almost a smile, said aloud : "Thank God, it will do! The auction will pay the expenses and debts here, and we need not touch the two thousand pounds. The piano either need not go; are you glad, Blanche?"

"Indeed I am, very glad," rejoined Blanche, looking up almost joyously; "I do not care, much at least, for anything else. But for the piano, I was so sorry."

"Well, we can keep it; and so Georgie can have her portfolio, and my mother her cow," continued Guy, with a smile; "and as to Edith, why she must make a new

garden for herself; I cannot carry off her green-house, pots and all, I fear."

"Scarcely, dear Guy, and so I have sold my plants, myrtle and all, to Mr. Huey for five pounds," returned Edith, trying to smile, though tears were filling up her eyes, beneath their heavily-drooping lashes; "it was much too good an offer to be refused, even if I could have had them with me, which was impossible; and, besides," she added, with a little hesitation, "you know I am not going to be much at home."

"Why, where are you going? Have you taken pity upon Tylden at last?" asked Guy, with a look of surprise. "Are you going to reward his constancy, and remain at the dispensary?"

"No—nonsense; you know I am not," replied Edith, almost colouring as she laughed slightly, "that is all quite nonsense; in fact, you know I firmly believe he only jested in asking me; but—but, now do not

exclaim, please, for it is absolutely necessary, and I have got mamma's consent. I have resolved to go out as a governess."

"You ! a governess, impossible !" exclaimed Guy, pushing back his chair, and scanning Edith from head to foot, as she stood bending over the box she was packing ; I should as soon think of—I don't know who, except Fedelle here, you are just about as fit."

"But indeed, Guy, I do know more than you think," said Edith, in a tone of slight mortification. "I have been learning a little all my life, not very regularly perhaps ; but I am sure, with Ollendorf's assistance, I can teach French and Italian, and even German to children. Uncle George said last year I pronounced them very well, and he should know. I can draw a little ; and though I do not play much, I understand the theory of music pretty well. Indeed, dear Guy, I should do better than you think."



"My dear girl, it is not your knowledge I question ; I dare say you know as much as half the governesses in the world," returned Guy quietly; but it is your fitness, your strength, morally and physically, your very appearance ; you, who shrink from unkindness like a sensitive plant, who colour if you are but noticed ; it is simply impossible."

"But it is possible, dear Guy, and it must be," urged Edith, gently but firmly. "I do not color now, and I shall not shrink from *strangers*. It is only when I care, when I prize approval that I am timid, and amongst strangers I shall be indifferent to that. Indeed, dearest Guy, I am stronger in every sense than you imagine ; you have not seen me tried," and she sighed slightly. Guy glanced suddenly at the half-averted face, with an expression of intelligence in his dark eyes that might have startled Edith had she seen it, but she did not, so con-

tinued. "I do feel confident, dear Guy, that I can fulfil the duties of a governess, and in fact, I must try—you must let me try—if I fail, the step is not an irrevocable one, I can but return home a degree wiser for my experience ; I *must* do it Guy," and she raised her eyes earnestly to his face.

"If you *must* I cannot stop you, Edith," replied her brother, gravely and gently, for Guy, perhaps, knew Edith better than any other person in the world—better even than Dr. Tylden. "If you have made up your mind to do it, you will at least make the attempt, and as you say it is but a trial, you can come back to us—to my mother, that is—for, of course, I too must do something ; I cannot wait for academic honors now," and a cloud of bitter pain swept across his face.

Edith looked up eagerly. "Yes, you must, Guy, indeed you must," she said hastily, and with a flush of pleasure mounting to her

cheek ; " that is just it, Guy, just one thing at least that influenced me : if I am a governess you can continue at college, and that is, oh ! such pleasure."

" And you are to work for my support—make a slave of yourself for my advancement, my pleasure," said Guy slowly. " Oh, Edith."

" It will be no slavery, no toil, indeed it will not to me," returned Edith earnestly, " and it is not for you alone, you must not think that. I have long wished for something to do—something definite to employ me—mind and body, and to assist you to finish your college course is only the sweetening drop in the cup ; if you were to take that out it would be all drudgery. Besides, some time or other I mean you to repay me," she added with a smile. " Some few years hence I intend you to have another Oldfield Rectory, and then I mean to instal myself as its mistress until you provide

another. That is my dream of life, Guy ; and if you leave college it can never be fulfilled."

"No, of course not, it never can," muttered Guy, absently ; then looking up, he exclaimed, "but why can I not work it out myself? if you can be a governess, I can be a tutor. I have it. Sir Charles Ogilby wants a tutor for George, his son ; I will write to him this day. Hurrah, Edith, my best little guide, we shall have the rectory yet," and drawing pen, ink, and paper, before him he commenced writing.

Return of post brought a favourable reply from Sir Charles Ogilby, who was delighted to secure the high-spirited, gentlemanly young man whom he had occasionally met in society, and for whom he had conceived a strong liking, as tutor to his young son, and inmate of his house. So Guy was readily installed in his position, at the moderate salary of fifty pounds per annum, thirty of which he mentally resolved should

form part of his mother's income. The same post brought a letter to Edith also, from her kind old friend, Lady Oldfield, to whom she had applied for assistance in her scheme of independence, and it, too, was favourable to her wishes. A friend, in whom she felt a strong interest, was anxious to procure a governess for his two children, girls of thirteen and eleven, to whom he would give thirty pounds a year (more than Edith had dared to hope for), and Lady Oldfield earnestly wished she should take the office. "There are drawbacks, and serious ones, no doubt," she wrote, "but such as I think you are precisely best fitted to cope with. I do not actually know Mrs. Isham, but I fear her temper is far, very far from an agreeable one. She is at times frightfully violent; but you, my dear Edith, are peculiarly calm, and who knows but you might be the means of restraining and recalling her to a better sense. A gentle

nature frequently gains control over an unreasonably passionate one, from the very force of contrast, provided, of course, the gentleness be not the result of weakness, and I do not think yours, my dear, proceeds from that cause; you can be gentle, to a certain point, firm to obstinacy, beyond it. Without flattery, I think, Edith, you are suited beyond any one I know to take the charge of William Isham's little girls, who, I fear, have been, and are, sadly neglected in all that a mother should watch over; and Mr. Isham will do all that a most amiable and unselfish man can do to smooth your way; more I cannot promise."

"In fact, Mrs. Isham is a frightfully ill-tempered woman, Mr. Isham an amiable martyr (with whom, be he ever so handsome, you must take care not to fall in love), and the children untrained monkeys, of whom you may make anything," remarked Georgie, as she read the letter. "Will you go Edith?"

"Yes," replied Edith, firmly. And she went.

Within a month, the little party so lately gathered into one nest were scattered far and wide. Mr. Waldron slept in his narrow bed in Oldfield churchyard, at rest until the "trumpet shall sound, and this mortal put on immortality." Mrs. Waldron, Georgina, and Blanche, settled in their quiet home, a cottage in the remote village of Milford, seventy miles from their old residence; and Guy, on his way to Ogilby Hall, in Devonshire, had deposited Edith at "The Elms," Mr. Isham's handsome mansion in B——.

Mrs. Isham *was* a woman of most unhappily violent and jealous temper, so much so, that by many she was considered insane; but such was not the case *yet*, though how soon her extreme irritability might reach that point it was difficult to say. A more diametrically opposite disposition than that

of her unhappy husband it would be hard to find, for he was gentle and unselfish almost to a fault. Had William Isham been united to a woman of even moderately amiable temper, few homes and firesides might have been happier ; for, besides his utter unselfishness, he was warm-hearted, tender, and generous, but at twenty-two he was not, unfortunately for himself, hypercritical as to those qualities in others, and Lillias Leslie's brilliant beauty and apparent liking for himself had won, first, his admiration, and then his love. Fortune, position, and appearance (for he was more than commonly handsome and distinguished looking), had been in his favor, and the beautiful Lillias married him. Before a year had passed over their heads he had repented his rashness, for in that short time she had already given way to and displayed her miserable temper ; and in all the fourteen years that had since elapsed, he had never known even the semblance



of the domestic happiness he was eminently fitted to enjoy. Even with his children, whom he idolized, and who gave to him all the love that might ordinarily have been divided between both parents, her evil spirit interfered, marring that glimpse of happiness—for the idea that he cared for them and they for him more than either for her, was gall and wormwood to their mother's jealousy, and, therefore, to display the slightest fondness in her presence was to bring on a paroxysm of rage most difficult to realize in imagination ; and this violence, instead of lessening, grew day by day, and year by year, stronger and less controlable. Of course had Mr. Isham been a man of much moral strength, he might, in some degree at least, have curbed these outbreaks ; but at first he had yielded from affection, and when the evil effects of his gentleness became at last painfully apparent to him it was too late, she had taken the reins in

her own hands, and his was not the will that could wrest them from her : so at six and thirty, he was in appearance and spirit but the wreck of his former self—still elegant-looking, and even handsome, but with a settled sadness upon his worn features, and an almost painful vacillation of manner, resulting from the life of constant dread and misery of the last fourteen years. At the time Edith came to the Elms, Emily, their eldest girl, was a few months past thirteen, and it was feared, inherited, with her mother's brilliant beauty, much also of her violence of temper ; with this essential difference however, that Emily was straightforward and truthful to a degree ; whilst to Mrs. Isham falsehood and deception were far more congenial elements. There was a generosity too in Emily's disposition that formed a fair ground to work upon in the construction of a noble character ; whilst her extreme warmth of

heart made it plain that by winning at once her esteem and affection she might be led with perfect ease, and under commonly judicious guidance, formed into one in a thousand. Little Lilly was two years younger, and in appearance her father in miniature—fair, soft, and winning, with the same fathomless blue eyes, made deeper and softer still by the length of the lashes that shaded them, and almost irresistible in their expression of earnest sweetness ; and yet, it was on this fragile thing that Mrs. Isham's fury was most frequently poured out, for she knew that in grieving her she wounded her poor father far more keenly than the fiercest personal abuse could do ; and it seemed to give her a fiendish delight to see poor Lilly weep.

Such was the family of which Edith—gentle, sensitive Edith—had become a member. But Edith had already learned that this world was far from all sunshine,

however bright it might appear at first sight, and the feeling that "the breast that inly bleeds, hath nought to dread from outward blow," unconsciously nerved her to *fear* less than she would have thought possible two short years ago. For Edith had not forgotten Hubert Wycherly, though the only outward symptom of the inward wound was a certain calmness of mien, resulting from increased indifference, and imparting a composure of manner difficult to ruffle, and differing widely from the shrinking timidity which her former keen sensitiveness to the very idea of unkindness had lent to her air. Perhaps it was this very calmness (which unconsciously increased every time she entered her presence) which exercised a salutary influence upon Mrs. Isham's excitability, but for several weeks after her arrival, she was called upon to witness no violent outbreak of temper; and though from various slight (slight at

least in comparison) bursts of angry impatience, she could see that the demon was not wholly subdued, she had begun to hope that the reality was not so terrible as she had feared, when her dream of peace was scattered to the winds by the fulfilment of her worst dread. About a month after she had entered upon her duties, as she and Emily sat one morning in the hitherto undisturbed schoolroom, a sudden cry startled both from their occupation, and the same moment little Lilly, with terror in her eyes, and the scarlet stain of a severe blow marking her soft cheek, rushed wildly into the room, and springing into Edith's arms cowered convulsively into her embrace, unable to utter more than the terrified words—

“Save me ; oh, save me !”

“Save you from what ? what is the matter ?” enquired Edith, half divining, and yet scarcely believing in the cause of

the child's anguish. "What have you done, Lilly?"

"Nothing, oh, nothing; I did not do it, indeed I did not; *you* will believe me though she will not; oh, save me, dear, dear Miss Waldron, or she will kill me, I know she will."

"Not whilst I can hold you, my darling," returned Edith, clasping the trembling little form closely to her side, as she smoothed back the dishevelled curls from her pale face with a soothing hand, "no one shall touch you."

But the words died upon her lips, for at the same instant the door was dashed violently open, and with features pale from rage, and her dark eyes flashing, Mrs. Isham rushed into the apartment.

"Where is she? I will have her! I will beat her!" she exclaimed passionately; and springing towards Lilly, as she spoke, "I will kill her."

Edith's cheek had grown very pale, but she was quite calm, and hastily motioning Emily back, as she threw herself in between her mother and sister, she bent a firm look of something very nearly approaching defiance upon the intruder's infuriate face.

"You shall *not* touch her, Mrs. Isham," she said quietly; "not even approach her whilst you are so excited. What has Lilly done?"

"Broken my vase—my beautiful vase—and denied it, liar as she is," exclaimed Mrs. Isham, frantically, but without daring to draw nearer to the calm, pale girl, who, from the mere force of superiority, held her in check. "She is a liar, and she shall suffer for it."

Edith almost smiled; she had seen already how small Mrs. Isham's own regard for truth was, but it was no time for smiling then, for with her usually pale olive cheek flushing crimson, and a defiant

flash in her dark eyes, Emily confronted her mother.

"It is *you* who say what is false ; *you* who are the liar mamma," she said, passionately, "and you know it too, for you know Lilly never told a lie. It was *I* broke your vase—or, rather, papa's vase, for he bought it."

"You ! and you dare to stand there and tell me," exclaimed her mother, turning fiercely upon the undaunted child. "Then I will beat you too, brave as you think yourself."

"No, you will not—you dare not," returned Emily. "You never dare beat me, for I am not afraid of you ; it is only Lilly, because she dreads you."

"Then I will beat her—I will kill her, if I like," exclaimed the innately cowardly woman ; and before either Edith or Emily could interfere, she had grasped the poor child's long curls in her hand and



almost dragged her from her clinging hold of her young governess.

To wrest the curls with a gentle but strong hand from Mrs. Isham's fingers, and forcibly thrust Emily back, was the work of an instant, and then, with the now almost convulsed child clasped closely in her arms, Edith stood erect to her full height before the frantic woman.

"I have said you shall not injure Lillias, and I mean it," she said in a tone almost contemptuous in its calmness. "She has done nothing to merit punishment, and it shall not be inflicted."

"Shall not, to me!" screamed Mrs. Isham. "Who shall prevent me? who will dare to prevent me if I choose?"

"I will," rejoined Edith; "I will, if I am able—Mr. Isham, if I am not."

"Mr. Isham!" repeated his wife, her fury now wholly bent upon Lilly's slight champion. "How dare you mention Mr.

Isham ! call upon my husband to take your part, you shameless minx ! He dare not, willing though he may be—he dare not in my presence. What are you but my servant—my paid and hired servant—and will you dare to thwart me ? I could strike you, and I will.” And, raising her hand, she struck Edith twice upon the cheek.

The blood rushed wildly through every vein in Edith’s frame, dying her very forehead crimson, and then receded as rapidly, leaving her pale as marble, all but the spot where the hateful hand had fallen.

“This, at least, is past endurance,” she said, as soon as she could speak ; “Mr. Isham must know it now. I would have spared him if I could,” and she turned towards the spot where Emily had stood ; but without waiting for the desire, Emily had already rushed from the room in search of her father, to whom, in a few hurried words, she related the disgraceful scene

she had just witnessed, drawing him passionately, even while she spoke, towards its scene. Very pale, but with almost a look of determination on his compressed lip, the unhappy husband entered the room, and, advancing at once towards his wife, demanded the cause of such an outbreak towards Miss Waldron. The words were inauspicious, and immediately turning upon him, the frantic woman poured a violence of abuse and fury upon his devoted head, accusing him of injustice and partiality ; for, forgetting in her blind rage the original cause of her anger, she now bent it wholly upon Edith, and had he not already gleaned a sketch of the truth from Emily's hasty words, he would have been quite in the dark. In wild words she accused him of caring more for his governess than his wife—of fostering her pride and presumption at her expense; and other charges equally false and incredible,

but poured out in language that brought the hot blood tingling through Edith's veins to her very brow, and, at length, forced her to rush from the room, and throwing herself upon her bed, sob in the passionate grief of outraged feelings, and unutterable humiliation.

More than an hour passed before the tender caresses of the children who had followed her could soothe the terrible excitement that thrilled through every fibre, and then it was more the quiet of exhaustion than composure that crept over her wearied senses. For a long time she lay quite still, trying to think what she ought to do. Now startled by the remembrance of the insults she had been subjected to—the burning spot upon her cheek still bearing them witness—into the resolution that she must and would leave her present abode. Again, softened by the little hands that ministered so tenderly to her slightest

wants, hovering round her aching head with cooling appliances, stealing into her burning fingers, and clasping them with the quick soft touch of earnest sympathy. Softened by these, she almost realized that it was her duty to remain ; and “ bearing all things, hoping all things,” endeavour to lessen the evils that surrounded her two little charges, and lead them onward as she best might ; and last, not least, swept over the thought, “ what does it matter—why should I care when my own heart condemns me not ? ” And then a rest came over her spirit—not, perhaps, the *best* rest, but next best.

From these thoughts she was roused by a message from Mr. Isham, requesting to see her, and, still trembling and pale, she hastened to obey it, rightly conjecturing that the interview would decide the matter for her.

Wearied and worn out, sick of life and

life's burdens, Mr. Isham sat in the drawing-room alone—Mrs. Isham having, as usual after a paroxysm of passion, been carried to her bed, declaring herself violently ill, and really utterly exhausted—but almost a color flushed his cheek, as rising, he came forward to meet Edith, and in few but kindest words, expressed his deep regret for the insults she had been called upon to bear; and then earnestly, almost passionately, besought her, for the sake of the unhappy children she had taken under her care, to overlook, and endeavour to forget the past scene, and bearing with the miserable temper of which she had just witnessed a display, remain with them as long as she possibly could; adding his earnest assurance of doing all that lay in his power to prevent a repetition of such scenes, and endeavouring as far as he could to make her residence as free from annoyance as it could be under the circumstances.

He spoke earnestly and sadly. And Edith felt almost glad to be relieved from the responsibility of deciding, and have a good pretext for remaining—so she quietly acquiesced ; receiving in return his warmest thanks, and the children's delighted kisses. Lilly, in particular, expressing her gratitude by pressing the small hand she clasped to lips, cheek, and brow, in silent joy. As she rose to depart, Mr. Isham made a step forward, and with a slightly quivering lip, and hesitating tone, said :

“ Her allusions to—to me, I trust you will also forget. Of their total want of foundation your own mind must convince you ; and, unhappily, this is not the first time they have been similarly made.” (Edith started ; and he continued hastily,) “ Not with regard to you, believe me, but of others—of every one, in fact, towards whom I ever ventured to feel the faintest interest—nay, to whom I ever paid the

common courtesies due from a gentleman to a lady. They need not, therefore, pain you, for I fear you will soon see how wholly her wretched jealousy blinds her to all sense of right or justice. These are bitter and humiliating truths for a husband to be obliged to speak ; but it is better we should deal candidly—it is best you should know the worst of what cannot be long hidden. For my children's sake I ask you to endure—to bear, and forbear.” And then, bending down, he pressed a quivering kiss upon Lilly's forehead, as she clung to him, and hurried from the room.

“ Why does he submit ? why does he not force her to obedience ? ” thought Edith, as she took her way to her own room once more. “ Is it not man's prerogative to rule ? Is he not the head of the woman ? ” and she trod impatiently along.

The barrier was now broken down, and Edith was called upon to witness many



repetitions, more or less violent, of the foregoing scene; but, whether through Mr. Isham's care, or her own steadfast resolution, not by word or look to give cause for anger, or even when it did fall, to take offence, she seldom was personally concerned in them. As much as possible, too, she kept the little girls with herself, and apart from their mother, who cared too little about them, and too much for gaiety and admiration to notice their absence. The very commencement of a fit of ill-temper was a signal for her, and, if possible, the children, to leave the room; and by quiet perseverance, she pretty nearly established the fact of the school-room being her exclusive domain. But her heart often bled for poor Mr. Isham—even when in leaving the room, she knew she was doing the best she could to spare him from humiliation and pain. Had he been a stronger-minded man—one to whom she

could have looked up, and relied upon—her situation might have been a perilous one for her happiness : but though she sincerely pitied, she felt she almost despised him ; and not unfrequently found herself wondering if it could really be a *man* who could submit without a struggle to the tyranny of even so fierce and uncontrollable a temper as that of his wife—who, in fact, could submit to *any* woman as he did. Hubert Wycherly would not.

Christmas came. But much as Edith longed for even a few days of peace and rest, she wisely determined that the expense would be hardly compensated for by the very short time she could absent herself from her duties ; so the day passed over, only marked by a more than ordinarily violent outbreak of Mrs. Isham's temper, upon the occasion of Mr. Isham's venturing to give Edith, with the children, a trifling gift. So she went to church by herself,

and knelt before the sacred table to ask strength to pursue her difficult and lonely path, even as He whose advent she commemorated would have it pursued. It was a lonely life. Even with the tendrils of childish love clinging daily more closely round her, there were moments and hours of weary longing for something more—something that had been, and was not. An aching void was in heart and spirit; yet it was a heart strengthening day by day for its burden, by no rapid strides now; those were past, but not the less surely.

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## CHAPTER IV.

“Tho’ happy still, yet chance distress  
Hath left a pensive loneliness.”

WINTER rolled on into pleasant spring-time, and spring again gave place to sweet summer; and Edith’s little charges had so wound themselves round her heart, that it was almost with a pang she quitted them, for the long looked forward to visit to home—“sweet home!” whither Guy, after a day spent at “the Elms,” had preceded her. They were to spend a month—a whole summer month once more, all together, and it was hard to say which rejoiced most. What decking of the cottage drawing-room, first by Blanche’s busy hands, then Georgie’s delicate artist

touch, lastly, by the mother's loving fingers? What trimming up of the sunny garden, to look its brightest for "Edith," and training of the roses and hops over the shady arbour for "lazy Guy?" "What would the one think of this trifle—the other of that?" And then, when "lazy Guy" did come, and though sitting in the arbour, with the pretty garden all before him, refused to say one word as to whether "Edith was altered," or "Edith looked well," or even if "Edith's children were as pretty and fond of her as she described." Wearying for Edith's own arrival, became more eager still, and brought more colour to Georgie's wan cheeks and brightness to her eyes, than had been there for many a-day—almost since the terrible fever, which, after taking the father from amongst them, had sapped the best life from poor Georgie's being, leaving her, for the rest of her days, a

frail invalid, shrinking, like a sensitive plant, from every rough breath of air.

“Edith, you *are* altered—you are grown different,” said Blanche, turning suddenly round from the piano, upon which she had been playing scraps of airs, as the evening after Edith’s arrival the little party sat in the twilight drawing-room; “you are changed, and yet I cannot discover how, or where.” Edith smiled, and looked up.

“You are grown wonderfully calm and womanly, my child,” remarked Mrs. Waldron, smoothing back the silken hair from Edith’s forehead with a caressing hand, and yet gazing thoughtfully upon that fair forehead, and into the quiet eyes beneath; “more womanly than even a whole year’s absence might account for. What have you been thinking of, my darling?”

Edith’s cheek flushed slightly, and Guy from his sofa glanced a quick look upon her

face ; but she only laughed gently and said :

“ I have had the responsibility of a family upon my head, you know, mamma.”

“ Of course, the charge of two growing young ladies would sober any wild maiden into premature age, I am sure,” added Blanche, gaily, “ to say nothing of a wild wife and unhappy husband. By the way, Edie, you have told us nothing of them yet : Emily I know, and Lilly I know, but what of Mr. and Mrs. Isham ? Is she such a fiend as we hear, or is it all a myth ? Your letters never even mention them.”

Edith hesitated, and Guy's help assisted her : “ You would not have us governesses and tutors, tell tales out of school, would you, Blanche ? ” he said in a tone half jest—half earnest, “ or tattle about what does not concern us ; we have a great many too important subjects to occupy our minds to leave room for gossip ; and, besides, the old adage, ‘ least said is soonest mended,’

is an admirable one. Come here, Edith, and abide under the shadow of my wing, out of that draught too, which is in danger of blowing the hair off your head—‘birds of a feather flock together,’ you know.”

“And it strikes me, that the difference in the arrangement of Edith’s feathers has a considerable hand in her altered appearance,” remarked Georgie. “Where are your curls gone to, Edie?”

“That is it, ‘Eureka!’” exclaimed Blanche; “that is the whole affair. It has puzzled me, ever since she came, what it was which had imparted such a—a—I-cannot-describe-it air; something between dignity and reserve, and grace, and calmness, and all four mixed and compounded (as Dr. Tylden would say) into a something that makes me feel half afraid and uncommonly small in her presence. Edith, the curls must come down to-morrow; I will have ‘Edie,’ not ‘the governess,’ at home.”



"I am not sure I do not like 'the governess' best," remarked Guy, as he drew Edith down beside him on the sofa. "She may not be so winning, but she is more impressive, more purpose-like, as if there were more *thought* in her, not mere flights of fancy;" and his dark eyes grew deep in their expression, as he bent them earnestly upon each feature of his sister's fair face.

Nevertheless, the curls did come down; and though Blanche tried to persuade herself that the "dignity" had vanished with the sober braids, Guy's satisfied smile seemed to say that he could not quite agree with her. "No one would call her '*soft*' now," he muttered; "that feature has gone by."

The month glided swiftly past, far too swiftly, it was so peaceful and calm, and then Mr. Isham, on his way from visiting his southern property, spent a day at Milford, and the three departed together from the

haven of rest, strengthened and refreshed for their divers paths. Guy spent another day at the Elms, warmly welcomed by Mrs. Isham, who could, when she chose, be winningly gracious, and upon whom the stately figure and easy grace of the governess's young brother had made a most pleasing impression, so pleasing that, had the young tutor not been too much occupied in petting and caressing fair little Lilly, and admiring, more respectfully, Emily's brilliant beauty, to notice it, he might not have formed the most elevated opinion of his hostess's discretion or conjugal affection.

And so another year wound on its way, passing out of the pale of time, with all its thoughts and events, its cares, pleasures, and sorrows, its crimes and goodnesses, never to return ! At the Elms there were few things to mark one day from another, at least to Edith, except that now and again, more than once, a day or two, sometimes

even three, Mr. Isham spent at Milford, on his way to and from the south, and at first Blanche wrote in raptures of him, his kindness, his gentleness, and good looks ; then her mention grew more spare, more in pity than mirth ; he had evidently confided his sorrows to her. At last he was not alluded to at all, and Edith only learned from her mother or Georgie that he had been at the cottage, and an uncomfortable feeling, unbidden and unadmitted, crept into her heart ; not that she doubted, she only feared, a shadowy fear of she scarcely knew what. Mrs. Isham's temper grew worse and worse, increasing, as it seemed, in violence, until, when aroused, she absolutely knew not what she said or did. The children, especially Lilly, cowered from her very sight, clinging to Edith as their sole stay, their only refuge, from the storms that threatened to annihilate them in their terrible passage. More than once she had saved them from actual risk,

at her own peril, but her fears were more acute for their mental than their bodily injury, especially Emily, whose naturally impulsive temper took fire from every spark, often, when they clashed, leaving it difficult to say which, mother or daughter, had been most in fault, except that the former was invariably the aggressor, and Emily generally aroused in behalf of some third person ; when herself the accused party she rarely resented it by more than a look of intense disdain and indignant denial, or, if really in the wrong, undaunted avowal of her fault ; but to abuse Lilly, her father, or Edith, was certain to draw on a scene such as Edith trembled to witness. True, her repentance was as quick and strong, but her young governess shuddered to think of the perils of such a temper amidst the rocks and rubs of future life, and prayed, how fervently none can tell, for wisdom to discharge the onerous duty entrusted to her, faithfully and truly.

With Lilly her task was much easier ; through the intense power of loving, that dwelt in her little heart, she could be quieted to anything and her extreme sensitiveness to painng others made her alive to Edith's very thoughts. To save her from grief strengthened her to bear and forbear more than seemed almost possible for so frail looking and gentle a little being, and Edith loved her with an affection scarcely to be realized much less defined. And so she trod on her appointed way, daily learning the rest of leaning more upon Him who ordained it, and in " His strength gaining strength."

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## CHAPTER V.

“Hark! to the hurried question of despair,  
‘Where is my child?’ and echo answers ‘Where.’”

“You did do it, you know you did, liar as you are, and I will beat you, kill you, your precious governess is not here now to protect you; I will kill you if I like.” Such were the words screamed out by Mrs. Isham, to little Lilly, who with her fair face blanched in terror, and her blue eyes filled with tears, stood holding in her trembling hands the fragments of a delicate workbox, which Mrs. Isham herself, in her usual hasty movements, had thrown down and smashed; and the mother struck the child a heavy blow, with a book she held in her hand. A scream broke from

Lilly, and Emily sprang forward and caught the book, as it was raised for a second blow.

“You dare not, mother,” she exclaimed, in the hoarse tone of intense passion, “you shall not,” and she endeavoured with her little strength to push her back upon the sofa she had quitted; but Mrs. Isham wrenched her arm away, and raising the heavy book, dashed it fiercely at Lilly, who stood quivering and still dizzy from the effects of the first blow. It was truly aimed—without a word or cry the child fell back, and the blood spouted forth as her head struck violently, and with a dull, crashing sound, upon the corner of the sharp steel fender : one sharp shudder, one quivering of the little form, and she lay still, motionless, dead. With a bound and cry, Emily sprung forward and raised her sister in her arms, but the head fell languidly back, and the sweet eyes were already fixed and

glassy, they would smile upon her no more. A long wild shriek of anguish reached Edith, as she sat writing in the distant school-room, and with a thrill of sickening dread, she started up and rushed along the corridor to the drawing-room. It had reached Mr. Isham too, and they met at the door; one glance was sufficient: there knelt Emily upon the hearth, her features rigid from horror, her arms by instinct rather than power clasping the murdered child to her breast, and there still, in the attitude she had taken to commit the deed, stood Mrs. Isham, still flushed and flashing; still but half conscious of the truth. To thrust her from her way, and by force take the blood-drenched form of her darling from Emily's relaxing arms, was the work of a moment, but she knew she was too late; the spirit was beyond recall, even to her love. With the calmness of intense emotion, she laid the



child upon the sofa, and ringing the bell, bade the terrified servant procure medical aid instantly, then approaching Mr. Isham, said quietly, "Take Emily away, it will kill her too." But the stunned father only moved forward to where his child lay dead, and sinking on his knees by her side, pushed back the clotted tresses from her brow. "Murdered! Oh my God, murdered!" were all the words that broke from his white lips, and the tall man bowed his head in utter prostration of mind and body.

With the strength, lent by powerful excitement, Edith lifted Emily, half insensible as she was, and placing her in her father's arms, peremptorily bade him take her to her own room, and then as he mechanically obeyed, she turned for the first time towards Mrs. Isham. "Who did this? How has it happened?" she asked, in a low stern tone, "answer me truly."

"How can I tell—what right have you to ask?" replied Mrs. Isham, fiercely, and raising her dark eyes with a look of defiance to her questioner.

"She broke my workbox—my beautiful box—and I beat her, that is all, and I will do it again, if I like."

"No, you will not—she is dead!" returned Edith, in the same lowered tone. "You have murdered her—murdered your own child!"

"It is false—she is acting—little hypocrite that she is!" exclaimed Mrs. Isham, glaring at the senseless form, with a strange light in her flashing eyes. Then suddenly moving forward, she took the little hand in hers—it fell back stiffly from her touch; she laid her fingers upon the pale, stained brow—it was already cold—chilly with the exceeding iciness of death. A wild laugh broke mockingly from her parted lips; and then with

foam rushing to them, the unhappy woman fell back upon the floor in strong convulsions. Before the village doctor could arrive, the once beautiful features had become locked and rigid in a hideous contortion ; and the limbs, a few minutes before so full of life, were stiff and helpless in the strong grasp of paralysis : the avenger was at hand—she was a motionless and speechless paralytic for life.

As Edith felt and knew, it was too late for the doctor to be of any use to the murdered child—death had been instantaneous, for the brain was crushed in, and, at least, she had been spared one moment's agony—but both Mrs. Isham and Emily required his immediate care. For the one, indeed, little could be done—she was simply paralysed ; and once laid upon her bed, there was little else to be done but to feed and clothe her. Emily required all that could soothe and calm her, or else brain fever would supervene.

So Mr. Isham or Edith sat by her side, applying cooling lotions, and speaking calm words. But Edith found time to straighten the limbs and close the eyes of her darling ; and she laid her upon her own little bed, in her last, long sleep, kissing her pallid brow and stiffened lips without a tear. She had no time for weeping yet. The next morning brought a hurried line to Milford, begging Guy, who happened to be at home, and Mrs. Waldron to come to the Elms ; but Mrs. Waldron was ill, and Georgina much too delicate to undertake such a journey, so Guy and Blanche came. Edith had never given way from her calmness—never wept, never faltered, never even seemed fatigued ; but when Guy folded her in his strong arms, the fearful tension of nerves relaxed, and with a shudder that shook every fibre of her slight frame, she sank insensible upon his breast.

The funeral was over. The gleam of sunshine hidden for ever from their sight ; and Emily—ghostlike, indeed, but calm—was moving about the house, before poor Mr. Isham had sufficiently recovered to think about the future ordering of his household. But when he did, his first act was one of delicacy towards Edith, who could not, of course, remain in a house so practically without a mistress. So he wrote to a widowed aunt, asking her to come and preside over it ; and when Guy came to bid him a reluctant farewell, put her acceptance into his hand, saying—

“This will, I trust, obviate all necessity for your sister’s leaving my poor child—she is all the world to me now, and I need scarcely say how great is the relief to me in being able to place her in the care of one upon whom I have such entire reliance. Miss Waldron is one in a thousand ; and Emily is my sole earthly treasure.”

So it was settled that Edith should remain as Emily's governess and companion; and for the present, until Mrs. Taylor could make her arrangements for residing at the Elms, Blanche, too, remained by Mr. Isham's invitation—an arrangement Edith before long half regretted, for she could not help seeing that Mr. Isham daily clung more to her society, and that Blanche's sympathies were deeply excited in his favor. Isolated as he was from affection, it was not much marvel that the kindness of an impulsive being like Blanche, should be most genial to a man of such warmth of heart as Mr. Isham really was. Nor was it very much to be wondered at, that the same circumstance should awake all the young girl's most generous sympathies. But pity is notoriously akin to a warmer feeling; and peculiarly as he was situated, Edith regretted that they should have been

thrown together. Nor was her uneasiness lessened when, at the end of a month's stay, he arranged to take her home himself—thus involving a journey of some ninety miles ; and, more dangerous still, a farewell journey. But Edith could not interfere without broaching an idea which, after all, might really never have occurred to her young sister ; and besides Blanche was not a girl to be dictated to. Their long separation had weakened the ties of intimacy ; and though still sisters in affection, their interests had been too widely apart to permit the perfect frankness that constant intercourse can alone fully keep up. So Edith saw them go, fervently hoping, that once absolutely separated, the fancy would subside and pass away.

Meanwhile Mrs. Isham lay upon her helpless and hopeless bed, free from all bodily suffering, but utterly incapable of sound or motion ; her eyes alone retained

the power of motion, and from them they knew that her mental powers were as acute as ever: the poor body was torpid, but the living mind was active—vividly and acutely alive. Often and often as Edith stood by her side, she wondered upon what that mind was dwelling; hours rolling into days, and days into weeks and months, and still the spirit that had never for one moment remained still must be imprisoned. Was it still fretting and tearing against its fetters in paroxysms of impotent passion? Or was He, who ordereth all things for good, turning it, perforce, to better things? Was the Omnipotence that calmed the wild sea-waves, and who thus signally proved His power over the things she had misused, when entrusted to her own care—was He calming the stormy ocean of her passions, and bringing her by His own all-wise means into the haven, where He would have her be? At times she feared



the first was the truth, so fiercely did her eyes burn and flash when things occurred, that in former days would have roused her into fury ; and most especially when Blanche approached, if so surely she was fitly punished, truly her sin was recoiled upon itself.

It was a long—long time before Emily recovered from the shock, which her highly-tempered mind, as well as passionately-strong affections had received. For months she could not, by threats or persuasions, be induced to enter her mother's room; and even when at length yielding to Edith's entreaties, she did do so, the interview brought on a relapse of the nervous fever, which the shock itself had caused. The image of Lilly, senseless and bleeding, haunted her like a nightmare; and, at length, seriously alarmed, Mr. Isham resolved upon taking her abroad, to try the efficacy of total change of scene upon her

over-wrought nervous system. At first it was proposed that only Emily, attended by her faithful nurse, should accompany her father, leaving Edith and Mrs. Taylor to take care of the paralytic ; but Emily so passionately deplored parting, even for a few months, from her dearly-loved governess, that the plan was altered, and the removal of the whole family decided upon ; the more willingly from the fact, that Edith's own health was far from strong ; and the physician pronounced, that the journey, so far from being injurious, might perhaps, prove beneficial to Mrs. Isham. So, late in autumn "the Elms" was deserted, and the sad party commenced their tedious journey towards the South of France, resolving to spend the winter at Pau, travelling by easy stages upon Mrs. Isham's account.

Winter had almost set in when they arrived, but Mr. Isham had preceded

the rest, and secured a tolerably comfortable villa, beautifully situated ; and as soon as the fatigue had worn off, the clear air and perfect novelty began to tell upon Emily's health ; her miserably low spirits gave place to the natural buoyancy of her age, and being constantly in the open air, brought back the glowing colour which Edith had begun to fear had been banished for ever. From a delicate-looking child, she started into a rarely beautiful girl, and it was with unspeakable happiness that Edith marked that the event, bitterly painful as it had been, had left its impress in beneficial results upon her character ; her naturally strong temper became subdued and controlled by will as well as principle, and whilst her generous impulses remained as fresh and bright as ever, she had learned to keep them within the bounds of reason. It had not been very long before Edith discovered that in the cause of Lilly's

death, she bitterly blamed herself, fancying that had she not so violently interfered, the fatal missile might never have been cast; and whilst Edith strove to soothe away this supposition, she did not at the same time less reprobate the act, though she believed it *had not* had the slightest influence; she did not attempt to say that it *might* not, and Emily took the lesson to heart. Almost the first symptom of the change of heart, was her voluntary attendance upon her mother, and though not permitted to remain any length of time in the sick room, she managed to prove her softened feelings in a thousand little acts, and words of sympathy and pity.

At first, Edith, who seemed by a sort of intuition to read her wishes in her eyes, thought that her daughter's presence was painful and irritating to the unhappy mother, but before long she changed her opinion, and fancied that the orbs expressed

more softness and less impatience during her visits than at any other time, and the knowledge gave her hope.

In these duties and thoughts, the winter passed over, and in the early spring of sunny France, Edith received a most welcome letter from Guy, written from Rome, where he had arrived, he said, "the previous week, in charge of his young pupil, and accompanied by Sir Mark Meredith, Sir George Ogilby's cousin, the ugliest, cleverest, most whimsical, but most agreeable of mortals; the possessor of thirty thousand a year, clear rental, and welcomed by half the belles and manœuvring mammas of England as a desirable parti. He says, there is not a woman upon earth to whom he would for millions be tied for life, nor a man worth feeling an hour's interest in, and in fact, I am enjoying the idea of your horror; I think it highly probable that you will shrink from him much as you used to

do from a toad, but nevertheless I like him." The pith of the letter, however (for Edith at least), lay in the tidings that there was some chance of their visiting Pau before the summer was very far advanced; and at Mr. Isham's desire she wrote to invite the trio to make the villa their residence, adding, at the same time, a little hint to Guy, to remember that she was only the governess, and very unlikely therefore to have much opportunity for liking or disliking his ogreish friend."

It was bright June when they arrived, and Guy was quite disappointed—for from the moment she met him, Edith rather liked Sir Mark Meredith. Ugly he certainly was, and eccentric he certainly was, but Edith had penetration enough to discern much that was beyond the common, beneath the externals. From the very first he treated her with a degree of courteous attention, far greater than he usually

accorded to the fair and fashionable dames who courted his notice as a favour; perhaps urged thereto by the governess' perfect indifference, and even ignorance of the honour. In the walks and rides of sight-seeing and lionising, he quietly constituted himself her escort, as much as Gerald Ogilby, a handsome lad of eighteen, appropriated Emily, leaving Guy and Mr. Isham to amuse each other as they best might.

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## CHAPTER VI.

“Yet, on the whole, who paused to look again,  
Found more than marks the crowd of vulgar men.”

NEARLY six weeks fled away rapidly, drives, walks, and rides, filling up every morning, and music and conversation beguiling the evenings. July came and went, but with August arrived a strong hint from Sir Charles, that it was high time for his son and his tutor to be journeying homewards. Sir Mark, too, received a summons from his solicitor, begging his presence on a certain day. So the party were to break up; of course every one was grieved, and so to make the most of the time, a long talked-of excursion to the peak of the adjacent mountains was determined upon, and on a morning such



only as bright France possesses, the party set out. As usual Sir Mark made himself Edith's guide, and Gerald taking possession of Emily, a pretty little French friend of Emily's fell to the tender mercies of Guy, quite to her satisfaction—the deep blue eyes and stately height of the young tutor having made a sensible impression upon her heart; yet a very visible cloud sat upon the said young gentleman's brow, quite unusual in so placid a personage, and which greatly puzzled Edith. Nothing could be more propitious than was the weather for the first two-thirds of their ride; but just as they reached the last and most difficult part of the ascent, a sudden cloud seemed to sweep down from the heights above, and almost before they were aware of its appearance, they found themselves enveloped in one of the wonderfully dense mists peculiar to those regions, and which make travelling so dangerous in the Pyrenees. Of course a halt was called, and whilst the girls were

carefully wrapt in the light mufflings they had brought, a council was held in which Mr. Isham and Guy proposed an immediate return, lest any, especially Emily, should take cold in the intense damp. Of course Emily *was* the first to be thought of, but it fell with pleasant music on Edith's ear to hear Sir Mark's peculiarly soft voice (the only soft thing about him) quietly pronounce *her* name, in the deliberations. It was like old times to hear herself thus remembered, and touched a chord which had not for many a day vibrated. Emily, however, assisted by Mademoiselle de Ferlin and Gerald, eagerly insisted upon going on, and as the guide lent the weight of his judgment in their favor, the more prudent party were over-ruled and gave way. In almost impenetrable obscurity they toiled on, guided solely by the instinct of their mules; and as they gradually ascended, the air became more clear, though beneath lay

the dense cloud, shutting out the lower world completely from their view. Of course they could not ride to the summit, so when the ascent became too abrupt, the mules were left to the care of a boy who had come for the purpose, and on foot they made the rest of the way, Sir Mark's firm hand supporting and guiding Edith's steps, whilst Gerald and Guy vied in their care of Emily, leaving Mademoiselle to Mr. Isham and the guide, much to her disgust. Very weary, and almost hopeless of being rewarded by the view, the little party reached the top, but at the very moment they did so, their wishes were fulfilled; for like a curtain drawn slowly back from some gorgeous panorama, the mist rolled aside, disclosing the whole scene beneath in all the glorious splendor of a flood of sunshine: an exclamation of rapture broke from the lips of most of the spectators, as their eyes rested on the magnificent scene, all the

more beautiful from its suddenness, and most of them felt well repaid for their toil, though several minutes elapsed before more than the first delighted exclamation was uttered. But Gerald and Mademoiselle were tolerably soon satisfied, and bethought themselves of the substantial recreation contained in the small baskets, which each person carried; so whilst the others rhapsodised upon the scenery, they laid out a very respectable luncheon upon the rocks. A very merry meal followed, and then more glimpses were to be attained. other points of view examined, all making time flit so swiftly by, that the sudden sinking of the sun behind a distant mountain, was the first thing that warned them of the necessity for haste, if they wished to reach the village at which they were to spend the night, before total darkness had fallen around; a serious business they knew, in such a region, especially should the mist return,

of which the guide confessed some fear. As rapidly, then, as they could they commenced their descent ; but what was their dismay upon reaching the place at which they had left them, to find no trace of boy or mules. In vain they shouted and whistled shrilly ; the reverberating rocks gave back the sound, but no human voice responded, nor could searching obtain the faintest trace of the missing animals, whose hoofs left no impression upon the stony surface. The gloom, however, was deepening; so, wearily enough, though with as much courage as they could muster, the girls professed their ability to walk, and they recommenced their descent. Before half an hour more had elapsed the dreaded mist once more began gathering around, shutting out the faint day-light that remained, and in a short time the guide came to an abrupt pause; he had missed the path, and ten steps more would have plunged them down the

steepest precipice of the ravine. An anxious consultation followed, the result of which was the reluctant conclusion that they must spend the night in the best manner they could upon the mountain. So, placing the tired but fearless girls in the most sheltered situation they could find, the gentlemen began a cautious search for an abiding place which would even partially shield them from the drenching mist and wild gusts of mingled rain and wind that swept heavily along the exposed mountain side; nor were their exertions unavailing, for in a few minutes they were fortunate enough to discover a kind of cave formed by the casting together of several large rocks, and large enough to contain the whole party. In a very short time they had made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, the largest shawl in company being formed into a temporary door, and the other spare garments wrapt round the ladies.

The scanty remnants of lunch formed a slight supper, and Sir Mark's ready wit furnished a lamp, somewhat "religiously dim," indeed, but very welcome, a bottle of salad oil, with the neck carefully decapitated, shreds of his handkerchief scientifically twisted, and a cigar match, forming the ingenious apparatus; and with this suspended from a projecting point of rock, the party arranged themselves for the night, Emily and Mademoiselle de Ferlin nestling together in the most sheltered nook, with Mr. Isham and Guy on either side, Gerald stretched at their feet, and Sir Mark, by a very determined move, beside Edith. "Every one for himself," he had said aloud, as he chose his place, "or rather," he added in a lower tone, "to take care of what is dearest to him." The words, and still more the tone, made a thrill run through Edith's mind, and brought a color to her cheeks, but it was sufficiently light not to betray her

emotion, so she sat still and silent. Gradually the fatigue of the day began to tell, and one by one voice subsided into silence. With her head upon her father's shoulder, and sheltered by his arm, Emily sank into slumber; pretty Odelie's cheek soon found a resting place upon Emily, and Gerald and even Guy gave way to the influence of the balmy god. In a little time only Edith and Sir Mark remained awake, and both had long since lapsed into silence. Edith had found a source of thought in a conviction which had suddenly broken upon her mind, that Sir Mark's kindness might possibly mean more than mere politeness—the tone in which he had spoken the few words as he lay down had vibrated strangely, and like a sound of by-gone days upon her ear, if not upon her heart; and now in the quiet night there swept up a crowd of trifling words and slight actions hardly noticed at the time, strengthening the new-born idea. But then,



how *could* it be, in rank, in station, in the world, he was so far removed from her, and he so fastidious, so high bred, and with all his kindness, so innately exclusive in his pride, it could scarcely be that he *could* think of caring for "a governess." The blood rushed somewhat quicker through Edith's veins as she half spoke the words to herself, and she unconsciously drew up her head with a gesture of the inborn pride that not even governing could wholly eradicate; and then the thought suddenly occurred, "he may be trifling with me, presuming upon the fact of my being 'a governess,' and therefore utterly apart,"—could it be? something whispered not. There was a something in him, a vein of high-mindedness running through his very eccentricity that negatived the idea; peculiar, strange, proud, he might be, but not untrue. Thus far had she got in her pondering when it was interrupted by a hand being laid

gently upon hers, and her name quietly uttered by the very person who was occupying her thoughts. "I feared you were sleeping, you were so quiet," continued Sir Mark in a low tone, that somehow thrilled strangely through his listener's frame from its very quietude, "and I want to speak to you; it is a very abrupt way, no doubt, but you know I am not like other men. I want to ask you if you will become my wife, my very dear wife—will you Edith?" and the pressure upon the little hand increased. Edith's heart throbbed violently, and the fingers he held trembled in his clasp; but just then, before she had time to reply to the sudden query, there swept before her mind's eye, the vivid remembrance of a soft summer's evening beneath the sycamore shade at her old home, and a tall form bending fondly down, whilst dark eyes were gazing into hers, and a voice softer and deeper even than Sir Mark's spoke again the

thrilling words she had tried so hard to forget through the past years. It all swept back in a single glimpse, and with a quick but determined motion, she withdrew her hand from Sir Mark's.

"I cannot, Sir Mark," she said hurriedly; "it is impossible."

"Why?" asked Meredith, shortly. "Am I too ugly?"

Edith almost laughed. "Ugly! oh, no. I never thought of it," she said hastily. "I do not think—I mean I have forgotten that long ago."

"That is a comfort, though of course you ought to have denied the fact altogether," rejoined Sir Mark, quietly; "but I am fond of even disagreeable truth, it is such a variety; and now, why is it impossible?"

"I cannot tell you, you would perhaps ridicule me if I did, but it is impossible," replied Edith, as firmly as she could, though her voice trembled in spite of herself.

"In fact you dislike me," said her companion. "You are wrong, Edith, my looks are the worst of me; though I say it who should not; the kernel is better than the husk, a little."

"I know, I am sure of it," returned Edith, uncertain whether to feel amused or grieved; for though he tried to speak lightly, her quick ear detected the emotion that trembled in his voice; "I was just thinking so."

The colour rushed to her face when she had said it, but Sir Mark gave her no time for retraction.

"You were thinking of me, of what I was, and was not," he said eagerly, and with a light of pleasure flashing across his features; "you have been thinking of me whilst I was thinking and dreaming of you. Oh, Edith! do not say it was resolving to reject me."

"No, no, indeed, I could not, for I never thought of that," returned Edith, earnestly;

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"I did not know you would ask me; though," she added with a great effort to speak calmly, and as a mere matter of fact, "it had flashed upon me that you were kinder a little than was necessary—than our slight acquaintance required, and I wondered if you were amusing yourself at 'the governess' expense."

"Oh, Edith! you acquitted me of that, of such despicable meanness," exclaimed Sir Mark passionately; "you did not think me a scoundrel."

"No, I acquitted you of intentional evil," rejoined Edith gently, "you are too true and too proud to stoop to small cruelties; but I thought you did not think of it, our positions are so different, so widely apart."

"Yes, I am unworthy of you, unworthy of one who can forget self and self interest; who could give up comfort and love, and bracing a timorous spirit with the strong panoply of unselfishness, go forth to brave

the very thing she shrank from—the world,” exclaimed Meredith earnestly; “we are apart, Edith, for you are far, far above me.”

“Oh no, Sir Mark, you do not, you cannot think that,” returned Edith hastily, “you know it was not that I meant; but in the world’s eyes, in everything, we are separated; I am a governess.”

“You are a lady, that is enough,” rejoined Sir Mark, relapsing into his tone of quietude; “a governess added makes no difference to me. I admired you before I saw you; I have loved you since I did; and now Edith, if I am not too ugly, will you be my wife?”

Edith hesitated; but the answer seemed to come involuntarily, “No, Sir Mark, I cannot.”

“Why not? at least I am entitled to a reason,” inquired Sir Mark. “Have you an ungovernable antipathy to me?”

“No, oh no; I like you very much; more than any one I have seen for a long, long time,” replied Edith earnestly; “but

still—I cannot marry you—I cannot be your wife—oh, no, it is impossible.”

“You must have some reason, Edith,” rejoined Sir Mark; “you are not one to reject me for a whim—to give pain, such as you know you are inflicting, without some cause. Is it anything that I can remove? I will do much. Do you believe me, Edith?”

“Yes, I do; I have said I believe you to be true,” replied Edith, “but I believe the pain will soon pass over; that you will find one worthier of—of—your affection, who can requite it as I cannot. I could not love you as I ought—as you are worthy of, and as I have loved.” The last words were spoken low, very low, but Sir Mark caught them.

“You love another then,” he repeated passionately; then paused for a moment.

Neither spoke. How much passed through the heart of each it is difficult to say.

“Be it so,” he said at length, in a quiet

tone, "if it must, it is but a dream passed away for ever—the only vision of my life dispelled—be it so."

Edith could not speak, and they relapsed into silence, which she was the first to break after the lapse of several minutes.

"May we not be friends, Sir Mark," she said hesitatingly; "I have prized your kindness, it has been so precious to me, for—for—I have not many friends. Will you not continue to be my friend?"

"Yes, I will be your friend—your true and faithful friend," rejoined Sir Mark, quietly; "I have no right to urge more, nor would I, even if I could. You will never be annoyed by the mention of this again. You are the first woman I ever wished for an hour to make my wife, and you will be the last. No doubt you smile at the idea, but it is true nevertheless; I am no puling lover, but I do not forget. Well, well, no matter—I shall not die yet,



at least. And now, as the first act in our bond of friendship, have you any objection to telling me who it is who has stood so hideously in my way? do not, if you would rather not. I shall feel sure you have some good reason, for I could not care for you as I do—*have* cared for you I mean—if I did not trust you, and you may trust me.”

“Yes, I know, I am quite sure of it,” replied Edith, in a low voice which she evidently endeavoured to control into calmness, “and I should like to tell you, but there is very little to tell, for you do not know him, and I have never spoken of it to any one, it is so long ago too; but I cared so much that I cannot care again, it is all burnt out.”

“And he, Edith, (if I may call you so) he loves you?” asked Sir Mark, gently.

“He did. He has forgotten it all now,” replied Edith, still lower; “but,” she added more hurriedly, “I do not blame him for

that, I have no right, no reason to do so, for he was quite free—we were both free ; it was a bright dream, and that was all, only in a woman's quiet life it is so different from a man's ; it is only one of the gleams of sunshine thrown across your onward path --to us, it is all, it is life itself. I could not expect him to remember me, and—and—the pain is past long ago ; probably we shall never meet again.”

“ Will you tell me all about it ? ” said Meredith, quietly, and with much more the air of a friend of some twenty years standing, than a just rejected suitor. Edith hesitated.

“ It seems so strange to tell you—to tell any one of him,” she said, “ but I do not know why, I do not so much mind speaking to you as—as most people, you are so different, I believe, from almost any I have met ; I do not so much mind you.”

And in as few and simple words as she could, she related the short bright episode which

had so deeply colored her after life, passing gently and lightly over the bitter and, to her, inexplicable parting which had closed it. Sir Mark listened attentively ; he had forgotten self in her.

“ And have you never heard of or from him since,” he asked, as she ceased speaking “ in all those six years ?”

“ Of him ? yes, he wrote to dear papa more than once,” answered Edith. “ The last time was to announce his having obtained an official appointment in India, for which he was to sail the following month. We have never heard since, except from the public papers, where his name has been mentioned in terms of praise.”

“ Then it was he of whom Sir John spoke so highly in the House lately,” remarked Sir Mark. “ A young Indian official ; yes, his name was Wycherly, Hubert Wycherly ; he has brilliant talents for diplomacy.”

“He is gifted beyond most men in every way,” replied Edith, in an accent of involuntary emotion; “and I feel, something tells me, he will rise above them some day. It can matter little to me,” and a slight quivering sigh fell upon her listener’s attentive ear.

“You are one in a thousand, Edith,” said Sir Mark, shortly. “I was right in thinking there were not many such in the world;” and then once more they relapsed into silence. In a few minutes, however, Sir Mark shook off his thoughtfulness, and in a different tone, said: “You are to be my friend now, you know, Edith, and, consequently, my mentor (by-the-bye, how nine-tenths of the world would laugh at such a compact); but as my friend, I come at once for advice. What shall I do to employ myself? What am I to do to make me forget you, or, not you, but my vanity and delusion?”

“Work, Sir Mark—use the gifts God has given you in such abundance,” replied Edith, promptly ; “surely, you must have enough to employ a mind like yours fully and worthily.”

“How, Edith ?—and where ?” asked her companion. “I have been seeking it all my life in vain. How is a man without vocation or calling, and with too abundant wealth to make toil needful, to find work ?”

“Surely, you have talents, Sir Mark, and there must be means of employing them for your own, or your neighbour’s good,” rejoined Edith, earnestly ; “in parliament, for instance.”

“I abhor an election,” returned Meredith, abruptly ; “an election is to me another name for pandemonium. I could not truckle to an elector, or misuse my money in bribery. I should loathe myself, and despise the cause gained by such means ; besides, I am not gifted with eloquence—

I am not a Hubert Wycherly," then, more hurriedly, added, "I cannot submit to mediocrity ; I must be foremost in my line, however humble it may be—'Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven.'"

"Oh, Sir Mark !" ejaculated Edith, sadly, then continued : "the ladder must be climbed step by step, be the goal what it may ; and perseverance—persistence with heart, and will, and energy, seldom fail. 'Where there's a will, there's a way.'"

"Do you think so ? Is that your creed ?" asked Sir Mark, eagerly ; "I will prove it then, not in serving my country in parliament, though. Can you not suggest some other mode of spending my spare energies ? Believe me, I will follow your advice, if it be possible."

"You have property ; can you do nothing there ?" suggested Edith. "There should be much to employ in a large property."

"True ; I have sometimes thought of

that," rejoined Meredith ; " but I wanted a helper ; it would be desperately lonely work, toiling on alone. I have sometimes dreamed—it has been one of my day dreams—to settle down some day, with some one to join and aid me in my schemes for the benefit of mankind ; to urge me when I flagged, and rejoice when I succeeded. I have thought of it more than ever lately ; but no matter, that is all over now. Perhaps, the best thing I could do would be to go to Ireland and see the property I have never even visited there. I am not sure that I know exactly where it lies; somewhere in the far West I fancy—Galway or Clare, or some such out-of-the-way place. What do you think, Edith ?"

" I think it would be an excellent plan," answered Edith, readily, " the very best you could follow."

" Be it so then ; but, meantime, shall I give you a sketch of my life, when you

know that, you will be better able to advise me." And as Edith bowed assent, Sir Mark went on : " Until I was twenty-one I remember nothing but school and college, flogging and prizes, censures and medals, mingled with some grim days, misnamed holidays, passed in the most stately and most formal of mansions in the north of England. Of father or mother I have not the faintest recollection ; the latter died two hours after my birth, the former when I was four years old, leaving me, of course, to the tender mercies of two guardians, an old friend and fellow-soldier, who died within a year of my father, and my uncle, Admiral Meredith, the proudest, coldest sailor who ever trod a quarterdeck, or reared a boy nephew. As a necessary duty he undertook the guidance of my youth, and sternly and conscientiously fulfilled the trust. I had a tutor from the time I could dispense with a nurse—



perhaps before ; was sent to the best schools, where knowledge was drummed into my head, not absolutely at the point of the bayonet, but with ferule and birch, *ad. lib.*, thence, under the care of the grimmest of tutors, to Cambridge, and at one-and-twenty emerged into the outer world with as little knowledge of money affairs as most boys at ten.

“ On attaining my majority, I of course became my own master ; the owner of extensive estates in Wales and Ireland, and possessor of some eighty thousand pounds, accumulated during my minority. Need I tell you the consequences. You gentle girls know little of the headlong course of a young man placed in such circumstances—*you* especially ; suffice it to say that I ran the length and breadth, height and depth of it, and in four years had run through not only my ready money, but considerably involved my property. At twenty-five I

was blasé with everything in the world—in *my* world at least—disgusted with the hollow fawning of summer friends ; weary of London, Paris, Baden, everywhere where men congregate for pleasure. I despised mankind as a race—your sex in particular, for I had seen the bad, not the good of it, and in my folly judged a whole from a part. Yet through it all I felt a vain yearning for something better—a vague feeling that in some corner of the earth there existed the thing I wanted, a thing worth loving, and being loved by : I was right. After some months of sulky disgust I left England, and sought to kill time and ennui in finding out if all the world were equally detestable. I found it pretty nearly so. I have been in Russia's snows, and under India's scorching skies ; amongst the dark forests and grand cataracts of America, and stood at the foot of Egypt's marvellous pyramids—Europe is home to me—and

here I am now in the Pyrenees, with the only woman I have met in all my wanderings to whom I would willingly be bound for the remainder of my pilgrimage; and it may sound a wonderfully vain speech, *almost* the only woman who would have answered as you have done. I have not insulted you by speaking of rank or wealth; had you married me they would, I believe, have had no voice in your choice. As it is, it has been better left unsaid, and I would not have it otherwise now. No, Edith, dear as you are to me—and you will never know, perhaps, how unspeakably that has been—I would not have it otherwise now. I could not accept, I would not have, a divided heart; I must have all or none, and I thank you most truly for the pain you have unavoidably inflicted. There are not two in this world who, situated as you are, would have acted as you have done, and my vanity is soothed by the knowledge that I have had

discernment enough to single out the one ; that, cynical and reckless as I am, I have still goodness enough left to appreciate you—it reconciles me to myself. You see I am philosophic. And now, friend Edith, for the advice. Shall I go at once to Wales, and from thence to Ireland, see which place wants me most, and devote myself to the most hopeless ? Is that your advice ?”

Edith bowed assent.

“ And now for a request—not my first, or it may be my last,” continued Sir Mark, in a lighter tone than he had fallen into, but a more earnest one, “ may I write to you, and will you sometimes write to me ? Do not refuse me this too. I know it may seem a somewhat strange request, but you hardly know now how important it may be ; it will keep me in the right way. For should I ever relax or weary, I will cease, I promise you that ; and I promise too, never again to allude to the dream dispelled to-

night : as a friend to a friend only, our correspondence shall be ; but it may save a soul from ruin. You will not refuse me, Edith."

What could Edith do but acquiesce, and thus, on a misty night, on the Pyrenees, with but little hope of joy in the struggling future, and less in the lonely present, with a heart yearning still for the love that once filled it, and a spirit wearying for somewhat whereon to lean and rest. Even so, the little governess had obeyed the impulse of her spirit of truth, and refused to wed the man to whom half the world would have scoffed at her aspiring in very thought ; and stranger still, in the same guiding spirit, confided to him—to the sarcastic, the satirical, the half-dreaded Sir Mark Meredith, more of her dreams and thoughts, of her inner life in fact, than she had ever breathed to mortal before. And he, likewise, had to her opened more widely and unre-

servedly the page of his being than he had ever done to his nearest intimates. It was the instinct of truth to truth—the magnetism of kindred spirits; why was another nature permitted to mar the union? *Telle est la vie !!!*

The following week the friends quitted Pau; and, within a month, Edith had received her first letter from her new friend, dated “Llwyn Own, South Wales.” Of course, people laughed, and looked knowing. Little Mademoiselle de Ferlin shrugged her pretty shoulders and muttered, “Marvellous!” Emily glanced, laughingly, at her young governess’s slightly heightened colour, and even Mr. Isham asked with a smile, if there were anything particular in her letter. But Edith replied quietly in the negative; read the short but pithy epistle, and put it by to be answered in due course.

## CHAPTER VII.

FLIT we swiftly on bird-like wings over the space of two years, dipping but once down from our airy flight, to pause for a moment or two in a darkened chamber, and by the side of a parting spirit. It is the hour just before day, that chilliest space of time, when earth wears her blackest mantle, and even the mind of a watcher seems most easily depressed and cheerless, when, with a shudder, hope sinks, and forgetting the coming dawn, night appears endless. At this hour, and in a chamber lighted only by the faint night-light and still fainter gleam of the half-expiring fire, a young girl leant anxiously over the motionless form of a woman, upon whose

brow the cold damp of the grave was slowly gathering, and the restless motion of whose eyes alone indicated that life still lingered in its but partially animated casket: for six years it had been so—the body inert, lifeless—the mind speaking out through those restless orbs, doing duty for the whole being—but it was not to be so much longer; the time of probation was past—the hour of release at hand—for He whose power had given and taken, had bestowed and in mercy recalled, said “Come,” and the command was about to be obeyed. How had that period of trial been employed? Had it speeded on a good course, and provided the departing soul with a wedding garment, bestowed by Him who gave himself a ransom for such? On the deadly stillness of those years of self-communing had the small voice made itself heard in that tempest-tossed



soul, and whispered "peace;" or, had the time granted still been misused—was she about to appear before Him, unshielded by the vesture of repentance, unsupported by the hand that guideth through the valley of the shadow of death? Such were the thoughts of the pale watcher, as she leaned over that rigid form, vainly striving to read in the filmy eyes some ray of hope for future rest—something to speak of peace to those who should anxiously inquire the end.

"One word, oh, Father! one word of peace!" she murmured prayingly; "grant unto us one ray of hope."

And as if in reply to her petition, a gleam of light swept across the pallid brow, and the features relaxed from their rigid contortion, and whilst the fingers of the hand she half-unconsciously clasped closed earnestly upon hers, the tongue so long

silent was loosed, and the words, "Pardon and peace, through Jesus Christ," fell distinctly upon her ear.

It was the last gleam of the expiring lamp of life, springing up before it went out for ever in this earth ; one more pressure of the chilly hand—one upward glance of pardon and hope, and the spirit had quitted its mortal tenement, had broken its prisoning bands, and fled, to come back no more. Mrs. Isham was dead.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

“ But they who saw him, did not see in vain;  
Who once beheld him, asked of him again.”—BYRON.

“ At length we met again.”

RISE we once more upon our wings, and pursue our flight over the remainder of those two years, to take up the sadly frayed and broken thread of our tale, at the end of that period, or indeed a little more, for it is nearly Christmas now, instead of sunny spring. Take we it up, we say, in the important town of Aberystwith, South Wales, and in the gaily decked saloons of the Town-hall, on the eventful night of a ball, given by Colonel Sir Mark

Meredith and the Officers of the gallant Royal Cardiganshire Militia. A very brilliant affair it is, indeed; got up in excellent style, as the aspect of the spacious apartments testify, with the walls decorated with groupings of gaily coloured flags, stars of crossed sword-blades, and laurel wreathed tablets, bearing the names of our Crimean victories in letters of gold—the words, alas! too deeply graven in characters of blood upon many hearts. But no one thought of that then—it was all brilliancy and mirth. At the head and foot of the room are stands of polished arms, reflecting back the glitter of the flower-wreathed chandeliers, whilst, conspicuous above all, floats the gorgeous stand of colours, presented to the Regiment that day by the fair hands of Miss Isham—the belle and star of the ball-room. And very beautiful she is, with her tall, slender form, and gentle grace; her soft, pale cheek just

tinged with the same flush of pleasure that enhances the brilliancy of her dark long-lashed eyes, and speaks in the radiant and most sweet smile that plays round lips exquisite alike in repose or animation, with her volume of richly dark hair rolled back, *a la* Eugenie, from her pure intellectual-looking brow, and her gracious graceful air. No wonder she was the belle of the room; and yet it is not upon her, all brilliant as she is, that the dark eyes of decidedly the handsomest and most stately man in the room are rivetted, as, half leaning against a pile of arms, he stands pre-eminent amongst all the gentlemen, uniforms included, around. It is on a slight fair lady, in a dress of simple white silk, trimmed with water lilies, one of which is placed in the rich folds of bright hair, rolled back, *not a la* Eugenie, but in a simple and less remarkable style, from the delicate profile of a small fair

face, full of gentleness and sweetness, but calm and firm dignity. Such is the *character* of the face, and it is upon her that the tall stranger's glance rests earnestly, as she stands leaning upon the arm of a very plain, but unmistakeably gentlemanly officer, Sir Mark Meredith, in fact.

"Can you tell me the name of the lady leaning upon Sir Mark Meredith?" asked the stranger, in a musical voice, just tinged with a foreign accent, of a gentleman standing near him.

"The lady in white, with water lilies in her hair? that is Miss Waldron, Miss Isham's chaperone," replied the gentleman politely; "she was her governess, I believe, but is now her friend and chaperone."

"Waldron, governess, and chaperone! impossible!" muttered the stranger, half aloud, as he gazed still more earnestly at the unconscious lady. "It cannot be!"

"It is quite true," repeated the gentle-

man somewhat shortly; "that is Miss Waldron, and she was formerly Miss Isham's governess, though now her very dear friend, and about, they say, to be married to Sir Mark Meredith."

"Pray pardon my seeming rudeness, I did not mean to offend," said the stranger courteously, and with a slight but most brilliant smile playing for a moment round his curving lips. "I thought I recognised an old friend, which, under the circumstances you mention, is impossible—pray excuse me, and be so kind as to tell me the lady's christian name."

"I regret to say, I cannot, I hardly know the lady except by sight," rejoined the gentleman, still more politely, for there was something in the air and tone of the stranger, that told he was above the common race around. "I am very sorry I cannot; but there is her sister, Miss Blanche Waldron, the pretty girl in blue, leaning

upon the tall gentleman in plain clothes, Mr. Isham, her affianced husband, I believe, for it is said he is to marry her, as soon as his two years' widowerhood have elapsed. People say," he added, with a shrug of his shoulders, "that he cared for her long before he had any right to do so, for his wife is only about a year dead; but then she was virtually so for the last six years, being a helpless and speechless paralytic. Can I do anything for you, in the introducing line? I am going to dance with Miss Isham, so can easily procure an introduction to Miss Waldron, if you wish."

"Thank you, many thanks, but I do not dance much, and I fancy I am already acquainted with Miss Waldron," replied the stately stranger, bowing as his loquacious informant turned away. "Blanche! Blanche Waldron, her sister!" he muttered to himself, as he once more turned his glance towards the fair lady; "then it must be Edith, *my*



Edith once, and yet how changed—how strangely changed ! she is not ‘soft’ now ;” and as he thought this he began quietly treading his way through the brilliant groups towards the spot where Sir Mark and his companion stood, but as he drew near both turned away towards the open door of the now nearly vacant reception-room. With impatient look the foreigner moved quickly after them, and as Edith in the middle of the apartment stopped to speak to an old lady, they stood face to face, within a few feet of each other. With a vivid flush rushing to brow and cheek, and a breathless exclamation, Edith half bounded forward, then recalling herself, drew back as suddenly.

“This is an unexpected, a quite unexpected pleasure,” she said, in a tone quivering from emotion, but still forcing itself into calmness. “I did not know you were in Europe.”

“I only arrived last month, and little indeed expected to meet you, Miss Waldron,”

rejoined Wycherly, in a tone of distant politeness ; for, not having seen her first action, he felt stung by her air of composure. "I was scarcely indeed certain it was you, and have followed you from room to room before I ventured to present myself."

"Indeed, I did not see you, for I do not so easily forget old friends," rejoined Edith quietly, and with perfectly regained self-possession—for such was now become habitual to her. "I am sorry I did not; but allow me to introduce you to Sir Mark Meredith," she added, turning courteously to her companion. "Mr. Wycherly—Sir Mark Meredith."

Sir Mark's cheek flushed deeply, then grew pale again, as Edith spoke the name of her former lover ; but, recovering himself in an instant, he bowed graciously as he spoke the usual words of courteous welcome.

"I have so frequently," he added, "heard

Mr. Hubert Wycherly's name spoken in terms of public commendation, that it seems almost superfluous to introduce him; allow me, however, to fulfil my duty as host, and introduce you to a partner for this quadrille,—you dance of course?"

"Yes, sometimes, not very often," rejoined Wycherly, with a smile, partly of gratified pride at the gracious compliment, partly of mere habit. "If Miss Waldron, however, will allow me the honor, I will venture," and he bowed before Edith.

What could Edith do but pronounce a gracious "with pleasure," and accepting his offered arm they moved away into the glittering ball-room.

There was a whispered murmur of inquiry and admiration, as Wycherly, quietly leading his companion to the head of the room, took his place in the quadrille just forming; nor was it lessened as he moved with stately grace through the figures, apparently too earnestly

engaged in conversation with his graceful partner to heed or even be aware of the notice he attracted: for, truth to say, Hubert Wycherly was too well accustomed to flattery and admiration to notice it. With his tall and graceful figure filled up into one of most stately proportions, his extremely handsome features, and altogether most distinguished air, he could pass through few circles without attention; and to attend was to admire. Yet, Edith too was all unconscious of the murmured approbation, for her head and mind were engrossed with other and more urgent things; perhaps, had she been *less* engrossed, she could not have conversed with the same perfect calmness, but feeling how complete a scene of confusion her mind really was, she felt also the absolute necessity for controlling herself, and thus calling up all her long-acquired habit of self-command, maintained her aspect of quiet and slightly reserved dignity, an aspect that

Wycherly felt cast down a more complete barrier between them than the most contemptuous avoidance could have done; it was like a semi-transparent veil of some lucid but impenetrable substance cast round her. With the same perfect composure Edith introduced him to Blanche, Mr. Isham, and her beautiful pupil, marking with the same calm eye his look of extreme admiration—a look, had she but known it, assumed quite as much in pique at her coldness as in real admiration; but he danced with her more than once, and lingered near in apparently engrossing conversation, till half the gentlemen in the room were absurdly jealous. Little he knew the faithfully throbbing heart that beat under that calm exterior—no one knew it but Sir Mark, and even he was partially deceived.

Sir Mark invited Wycherly to make Llwyn Onn his residence during his stay in

Wales, and accordingly he and Edith were once more inmates of the same house—for with Mr. and Miss Isham and Blanche she was on a visit to Sir Mark—and they met yet day by day, and hour by hour ; and closer, and closer Wycherly felt the ties of old affections awaking, and drawing closer round his heart. Emily and her brilliancy were passed over, and quiet Edith became daily dearer and more precious, yet seemingly further than ever removed from his grasp—the impervious veil still hung round her.

Apparently Llwyn Onn was a very fascinating house, for day after day, until they grew into weeks, Mr. Wycherly postponed his departure ; putting off still the hour which he felt sooner or later must come, and fulfil or dispel the hopes which he now felt held his best chance of happiness in this world ; sometimes he scarcely dared to hope otherwise than the latter, so

perfectly easy—so calm was Edith's demeanour towards him. She never avoided him—never shrank from his approach ; but neither did the smallest token of agitation or emotion ever appear. Still the curtain he hated, yet could not grapple with, hung there ; and more than once he despaired of ever being able to remove it, feeling certain that behind there could be no pressure—no trace of the warmth, that he would willingly have given half his fortune to awaken ; and yet again, a word—a glance—a tone, would recall former days, and incite him to fresh perseverance and patience, in the hope that some spark did still linger, which, could he but reach it, might be rekindled. For Hubert Wycherly was but little accustomed to be repulsed, but little used to the trouble of having to “stoop to conquer ;” and the very difficulty had charms enhancing ten fold the value of the prize to be won. Had Edith

bowed at once to his power, the chances were he would not have cared one-twentieth part as much to win her ; but she resisted, and pride joined with affection in the struggle. Jealousy he did not feel, for, confident in his own superiority, he passed lightly over all others, including Sir Mark, looking down on all from his superb height with an eye of utter indifference.

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## CHAPTER IX.

“She scorn’d the offering of a heart  
That linger’d on its way.”

“AND so you were obliged to go out as governess?” said Mr. Wycherly, in continuation of a conversation held in the bow-window of Llwyn drawing-room, on a snowy day, which confined even the gentlemen to the house, and where he had stood leaning against the window beside Edith, as she sat painting a delicate hot-house lily, which Sir Mark had that morning brought her. “You were obliged to go out as a governess? How did you ever gather up resolution to take so bold a step, soft little being as you were?”

“I was not *obliged* to go; of course, I could have remained with mamma, as well as Georgie or Blanche,” replied Edith, a little

hurriedly. "There was nothing to *oblige* me to go, but I wished it; I wished to find employment for mind and body, and so I went; that was, in reality, I believe, my motive in leaving home."

"And why so busy? You used not to be so industrious, or dislike a little idleness so much," rejoined Wycherly, somewhat eagerly. "I remember when you could idle whole days as well as any one I know; as myself, for instance, who have stood here for the last two hours simply watching those dainty fingers getting soiled. I wish you would stop and make yourself agreeable to me. Tell me why you were so anxious to be busy?" and he lightly touched the small hand that rested on the paper.

The veil, which had been partially raised, fell down again: "I suppose I had grown older and wiser," replied Edith, in a quiet tone, as, releasing her fingers, she continued

her drawing. "Two years make many changes. I was only eighteen when—when you left Oldfield; I was twenty when I came to Mr. Isham, eight years ago now."

"Ten years since we parted! Ten years of busy life, and yet how little changed I feel," said Wycherly; "it seems like a dream, that so much can have passed over and through my head. You are more changed than I am, Edith."

Edith started. It was the first time he had called her by her christian name, and the colour rushed to her cheek for a moment, but she checked it.

"Do you think so?" she said gently. Yet Wycherly's quick ear fancied he detected a slight quiver in the soft cold accent. "Do you think so? You have gone through so many and such varied scenes you should be more altered than me, whose life has been so still."

"Yet, standing here it seems to me as if

I had only imagined that such could be the case," rejoined Wycherly earnestly, and in a deep soft accent. "It seems as if every throb that beat then, beat but a degree stronger now in my heart. I am the same now as then, Edith."

The colour faded from Edith's cheek as rapidly as it had come a few moments before, and her hand trembled slightly, but she neither spoke nor raised her eyes from her drawing.

For a moment or two Wycherly stood still as if waiting for a reply ; then, with an impatient flush rising to his cheek, turned abruptly away, and seizing a book from the table, threw himself into an arm-chair at some distance. When he raised his eyes again Edith was gone, and after a few minutes he, too, quitted the room, and snatching his hat, passed out into the snow-covered grounds.

It was quite dark when Edith, with a very

pale cheek, but a firm, calm look in her eyes and on her brow, emerged from her room, and passing down the wide staircase, stood for a moment in the corridor, as if unwilling to enter the lighted drawing-room, where at this hour the whole party usually assembled, and from whence the buzz of conversation reached her ear ; then turning hastily away, she entered the handsome library at the opposite end. There was but one shaded lamp lighted, and her light tread fell noiselessly on the thick carpet as she glided across the spacious room, and it was not until she stood within a few feet of him that she perceived it was already tenanted ; for standing upon the hearth-rug, with his arm resting on the high mantelpiece, and his proud head bent down upon his hand, was Wycherly, buried in what appeared far from a pleasant reverie. Edith would willingly have retreated unseen, but she felt such a step would be impossible,

and so, nerving her throbbing heart with a double veil of calmness, she stopped, saying gently—

“I did not intend to disturb you, Mr. Wycherly. I was not aware you were here.”

And then turning, she would have moved away. But Wycherly sprang forward, and catching her hand in both of his, said in a tone almost hoarse from strength of emotion,

“Edith, this must end—I must speak now or never. Can you, will you forget all the cruel past, and give me back the love that was once mine—that I so heedlessly, insanely cast away? Can you forgive me, Edith? my first and best love.”

For a moment there was a deep struggle in Edith's clinging heart, and her lip quivered in uncontrollable agitation, as past moments of rapturous bliss recalled by that voice rushed to her mind. But other memories crowded up too. The chilling, the wasting hours of anguish and vain

regret—the dream of years from which she so slowly awakened, it all rushed back in a whirling moment, and then, with an effort to withdraw her hand, she said in a calm low accent—*too* calm, perhaps, to speak real composure :

“It cannot be, Mr. Wycherly ; it is too late. As acquaintances we parted ; as acquaintances we meet now.”

“Parted, Edith ! Yes, I own it now with deep and bitter regret, we parted cruelly, coldly,” replied Wycherly, earnestly ; “selfishly, I fear ; for I do not attempt to say I did not know how painful such conduct must have been to you. But I have much to plead—more perhaps than you will understand.”

“It is useless speaking it, then, Mr. Wycherly ; useless in any case,” rejoined Edith, coldly. “We can never now be more than acquaintances ; let us remain such.”

“It is impossible, Edith ; I cannot, will not be a mere acquaintance,” exclaimed Wycherly, passionately. “We must be more or nothing. Surely ten years may have erased the memory of a youthful error ; and you, who used to be so gentle, so soft.”

“Too soft, Mr. Wycherly,” interrupted Edith, almost bitterly. “Had I been less so, I should have been spared much—it might have been better for us both ; but ten years of utter neglect following upon such a parting may well have erased the error—the youthful folly. We will part again as we have done before.”

“Then you reject me, Edith, finally and for ever,” said Wycherly, in a tone as low and calm as her own, as he drew his tall form to its utmost height. “You refuse to be my wife ?”

“Yes. The dream is past. I do not love you ; and without loving I will never marry,” replied Edith.



“And this is your reply—your final reply?” asked Wycherly, with something like incredulity in his accent. “Remember I never sue twice.”

“Nor do I wish it, Mr. Wycherly,” replied Edith, with a proud erection of her graceful head, as she raised her eyes fully to his face. “My answer must ever be the same.”

“Then some day you will wish it unsaid,” exclaimed the proud man passionately.—“Some day, when my name is spoken amongst the nobles of the land, you will regret this day’s refusal.” And, with a proud turn of his haughty head, Hubert Wycherly quitted the apartment.

Edith moved forward, and rested her head upon the marble to cool its fevered throbbings, and collect her rushing thoughts, and when, an hour after, with a pale calm brow she joined the gay circle, they guessed not the past hour.

Next morning Wycherly was gone; his proud spirit and impetuous temper could not brook meeting the woman who had rejected him; and the dream of Edith's life was broken—broken by her own hand. Had she no sustaining power—no other oak whereon to lean the clinging fibres of affection. Was the heart's void, indeed, unfilled? Two days after, Edith and Sir Mark Meredith stood together in the deep window of the ante-room, looking out on the calm, cold scene beneath, wrapped as it was in robes of snow; and Edith's delicate cheek was scarcely more coloured, though her brow was still calm, and her clear eyes as gently sweet as ever. Emotion had shaken her slight frame harshly in its rude grasp, but the spirit was pure and true.

“And you refused him, Edith; why was that?” asked Sir Mark, in a tone of wonder, almost mixed with reproach.

"Surely, *he* had no rival to rise up between him and happiness. Why have you rejected him, Edith?"

"Because we should have been miserable," rejoined Edith, quietly; "because in both of us, youth's dream and its delusions have passed away. It was pride, far more than affection, urged him to seek me now."

"Pride, Edith!" repeated Sir Mark. "What had pride to do with it?"

"The wounded pride of seeing I did not bow to his invincible power," replied Edith, with a slight smile. "The world has spoiled him, brilliant as he is."

"He is brilliant—brilliant in intellect, in mind, and in person!" rejoined Sir Mark, warmly; "such a man as is seldom to be met with in this every-day world. Had this brilliancy no influence, Edith?"

"Yes, the same influence as a splendid picture has upon the senses," returned

Edith. "I admired, but I did not love it. There are other and more lasting things than mere brilliancy I have learned, and affection is no mere parasite ; it cannot live upon the surface ; its fibres must imbed themselves in deeper soil to withstand the storms of life. I have learned to look deeper than the surface for affection."

"You have changed your opinion much in the last six years, Edith," said Sir Mark, in a tone slightly tinged with bitterness ; "such were not your feelings one misty night in the Pyrenees ; but no matter. I am glad, at all events, you are not going to marry Wycherly ; I do not think he could have made you happy. Though he is a fine fellow, he is selfish ; but I am selfishly glad, too, for if you had a husband, you would not have time to be half as much my friend, and then what would become of me ?"

"I would ever and always be your

H

friend, Sir Mark," rejoined Edith, earnestly; and raising her clear sweet eyes to his face, with a look of deep affection and confidence, "under any and every circumstance I will be your friend—your most gratefully attached friend."

"Ah, Edith! why will you not be more?" said Sir Mark, in a low and earnest tone, as he bent upon her a look of inexpressible affection, "why will you not be my all—my wife!"

Edith hesitated a moment, and her cheek flushed deeply, and then, without a word, she placed both her hands in his. The action and the silence were sufficient, and with a throb of rapture, he drew her to his heart—that strong, constant, and most unselfish heart—her shelter from every storm from which man's affection could shield.

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## CHAPTER X.

“He stood a stranger in this breathing world.”

IN three months—three months of deep, quiet happiness—Edith was married, Guy performing the ceremony in his own church, at the living to which Sir Mark had just presented him. And the world said that the handsome young clergyman was soon to follow his sister's example, and make a brilliant match, no less, in fact, than with the bright belle of the season. But the world, as it often is, was wrong, for on the very same evening, whilst she still wore her bridesmaid's wreath, Emily had gently told him that it was impossible; that, dearly as she loved him as a brother, it was only as a brother, and never could be more. So

Guy, and his mother, and sisters, settled quietly down into their pleasant parsonage, until such time as their circle was again to be broken in upon by Blanche's marriage with Mr. Isham.

Sir Mark and Lady Meredith went to Ireland, for a few months, and then, as winter came on, departed for Italy, ostensibly because Edith had never been in that land of song and skies, but in reality for the simple reason, that the adoring husband fancied that his precious wife looked more delicate than he wished. It was spring again when they returned, to be present at Blanche's marriage; and Edith was startled to see the change, which so short a time had wrought in her dearly loved pupil. At first she only felt that there was a change: but then her pale pure cheek had never possessed much colour, and its contour was as rounded as ever, so it was not bodily illness that had altered her.

In the fuss and bustle of the wedding, she could not make it out; but when the guests were all gone, the bride and bridegroom departed on the usual continental trip, and the two settled soberly down by the deserted hearth, she set herself quietly to work to solve the enigma. Before the evening had passed she had made up her mind, that the cause lay deeper than the surface—deeper, in fact, than she felt she had any right to probe. Emily was no longer a child, and, though still winningly frank on other subjects, and almost passionately glad to be once more with Edith, from the least approach to personal confidence she shrank decidedly.

“She was quite well, and had been most happy, every body had been most kind, and though, of course, she missed Edith, she loved Blanche next best. She had not been to the parsonage, because—because, she had thought it best not.”



And the blush, and half deprecating glance that accompanied the words, made Edith aware of how matters stood there; not that she had been so blind as to have been quite unaware of the state of the case, long ago—and Emily's candid "I was very sorry, Edith, but I did not love him that way," set her mind at rest, as to Guy's having anything to say to the matter.

Gerald Ogilby, came next upon the tapis, and with the same perfect frankness, mingled with some merry mischief, her quondam pupil related his vain endeavour to convince her that to be mistress of such a stud, and such a pack of hounds as his, would constitute the sum of earthly bliss.

"He went away, thinking me decidedly deficient in the knowledge of what was good for me," she finished laughingly; "but you know Edie, even his argu-

ment could not make me come down to the brute creation, and I know the horses and dogs would soon fill up my place in his heart. I have no ambition to be thought of as 'something better than his dog—a little dearer than his horse.'" And she drew up her stately little head. "I must marry some one I can look up to—some one I can admire, as well as love." Her colour deepened as she ended, and Edith's eyes rested inquiringly on the fair face, but it gave her no clue.

Several days passed, and the only thing Edith noticed, was the marvellous love for newspaper reading, which seemed to have taken possession of Emily; even Sir Mark, rallied her upon her novel taste, and sometimes averred that her colour rose suspiciously, as she conned over column after column of the "*Times*," but whatever his conjectures might be, he never spoke them even to his wife.

And Hubert Wycherly was rising rapidly and brilliantly in the estimation of men, till his name, as he had predicted, was amongst the magnates of England, and honors and favors fell thickly upon him, and yet he was a lonely and heart-wearied man.

Three more years passed over, and then on a chilly Christmas Eve, Hubert Lord Wycherly, the last created peer of the realm, sat leaning his head wearily upon his hand, beside the letter-covered table of his handsome library in G—— Street, London. It was a beautiful apartment, furnished with every luxury that modern comfort could suggest; rich in shelves filled with valuable books, in its ceiling of exquisitely carved oak, its splendid chandelier, and noiselessly soft carpet; nothing gaudy, nothing out of place, all simply rich and sombre as a library should be—almost the beau ideal of a library, and yet the noble

brow of the owner was dark, weary, and already care-worn, as if with years of toil; whilst an expression of discontent, nearly approaching to disgust, curled his chiselled lip, and slumbered in his dark eyes.

“I am weary of it all, weary and disgusted,” he exclaimed aloud, as with an impatient gesture he pushed away the pile of letters (chiefly congratulatory) from before him, and rose from his chair. “I am sick of hypocrisy and falsehood, of fulsome flattery and fawning civility; would to God there was one person upon earth to whom I might turn for truth, simple unvarnished truth. Am I never to find one being to whom I can turn for sympathy, for love? yes, it is love I want, love for myself—not for my influence, my interest; love that I can turn to and feel ‘it is my own.’ Is there none such left upon earth, that I must thus stalk on alone—thus stand like the upas tree, apart? I who loved, and was loved so

dearly once—who could love so well still;” and the lonely man quitted the hearth and traversed the length of the apartment with an impatient step. The second time he passed, his eye fell upon a letter lying upon the table, somewhat apart from the rest, and half mechanically he took it up; but the moment he did so a flush swept across his face, and with an eager hand he tore open the small envelope and glanced along the contents. With brightened eyes and an expression of pleasure lighting up his pale features, he read and re-read the short epistle; then, with his usual rapidity of purpose, touched the bell.

“My carriage to meet the mail train for Holyhead,” he said shortly, as the servant answered its summons, “and my port-manteau for two days;” and turning with renewed energy he began tearing open the heap of letters and papers so lately thrust aside; jotting down as he went along di-

rections for his secretary in replying. One or two letters were written with the rapid dash of an energetic mind; several bank notes folded into an envelope and directed to the clergyman of his parish, his Christmas contribution; and then, with the little note that had wrought such a change placed carefully in his pocket-book, he impatiently awaited the announcement of his carriage.

Early next day—(for he had travelled all night,) early next day found the distinguished orator and statesman, the fastidious Lord Wycherly, standing by the holy font in the little church of Llwyn Onn, one of the small party assembled to celebrate the baptismal rites of the future Sir Mark Meredith, and at his own earnest request one of his sponsors—sponsor to Edith Waldron's child! Emily Isham and Guy were the others, and as Emily and Wycherly stood side by side, and Edith's glance marked the

unwonted flush upon her pupil's cheek, and noted how his dark eyes rested upon her fair face, a new light gleamed upon her. "Yes, it would do," she thought, "they are well suited," and there was no shadow of regret in the idea.

Ten days after had found the busy statesman still lingering, as he had once before lingered, at Llwyn Onn. On the last, he again stood by the hearth in the library, with, like then, his eyes resting on a fair face—a slender hand clasped in his, and once more his voice was faltering from depth of emotion, as he spoke words of love.

"I have told you all now, Emily. My heartless folly, my bitter regret, and the fitting punishment of my years of loneliness. I have never loved another—never found another to love until now. Must I still reap the fruits of the seed I have sown, and go on alone for the rest of my life? It rests with you, Emily." And the hand

that held her's trembled in its close pressure. Emily's cheek had flushed whilst he spoke the rapid words, which told her what she had long thought the brightest happiness of earth was within her reach; but she was deadly pale as he concluded the tale, which in few but graphic words he had related, and for a moment she stood silent.

"You loved Edith, and yet you left her thus. Why?" she said at length, in a low clear tone that belied the intense throbbing of every pulse within—"why?"

"I can scarcely tell; I fear it was the selfish cowardice of dreading her tears and grief," replied Wycherly. "That I did love her, my life since has proved; in fifteen years of intercourse with every circle, and almost every clime, I have never seen another to take her place. I do not say that I remained constant all that time; far from it, she had passed wholly from my memory as a reality, but I can now trace



how it was the lingering remembrance of her that made me so indifferent to all other charms. We met again by chance, and the spell of her presence was renewed, but it met with no response ; the very fact roused all my vain self-love, as well as increased my passionate affection. Forgive me if I say it, but I had deemed her but a sweet, soft girl, to the strength and power that lay below the gentle exterior, I was blind. I had been told it was there, but I did not credit it, but now I do ; the trials that would have sunk a less noble mind, but brought out her's in its purity and strength. I knew all this when it was too late. She refused me, and we parted again, and then I knew fully the treasure I had lost. Of what the intervening years have been, it is useless to speak ; they have proved one thing, that without love, gratified ambition, wealth, honours, and flattery, are valueless. I have pined for the one thing

I could not gain, and without it all I have won has been nought. I love you dearly, Emily, not, perhaps, with the fresh passion of boyhood, or even youth, but with every throb of manhood's strong heart. My future rests with you; will you make it one of happiness, such as I had scarcely dared to hope for, or must I go on again alone? It rests upon this small hand;" and bending he pressed his quivering lips upon the soft hand he still clasped so closely as if fearful of its escaping from him.

For a moment or two Emily paused, and even Wycherly's breathless gaze could read nothing through the dark lashes that feared to rise, lest the eyes beneath should betray the feelings that seemed to still the very beatings of her heart in their intensity. Then slowly raising them, she said, soft and low: "I have loved you too long—too well; it is useless to try to curb it now, even if I would."

The last words were more murmured than spoken ; and before they were ended, she was clasped to her lover's breast, folded against the strongly-beating heart, whose pulse seemed strangely interwoven with her own. The jewel was found—the gem placed in its setting, a setting tried and purified in the furnace of disappointment, until it was become worthy of the priceless jewel it was destined to contain. \* \* \* \*

“Tell me you forgive me, Lady Meredith ; that my punishment has expiated my fault,” said Lord Wycherly, as, the night before his marriage, he stood with his hostess by the open window of the drawing-room, whilst Emily flitted amongst the flowers on the terrace beneath. “I shall feel happier of having heard you say it.”

“Forgive you ! oh, yes. I am too happy to be unforgiving,” replied Edith, with a smile like a sunbeam playing over her sweet

face. "Oh, yes ; you mistook me, that was all, and we have suffered for the fault. It was necessary for us both ; for had it not been so—had you loved me as—as—you seemed to do, I should have leaned upon you, and remained ignorant of possessing the strength that God had given me—I should have been 'soft' still." And she glanced up with an arch smile.

"And I thank you for your blindness," said a softly rich voice beside them. "Your mistake has been my happiness." And Sir Mark bent down and pressed his lips upon the upturned forehead of his wife.

"Yes, Wycherly, you had not learned to read character at twenty-two, and it took ten years to enlighten you. Thank God, that on one point, at least, you were less clear-sighted than other people. *I* never thought you 'soft,' Edie—especially

on that misty night in the Pyrenees; unless on one point—yes, I fear you had one soft spot too much then. Thank Goodness it got petrified.

THE END.









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